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Propaganda and Information Serving the Italian Sports Movement: The Case of the Periodical *Lo Sport Fascista* (1928–43)

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ABSTRACT

Transformed from a mass rite into a real instrument of government, sports became the most effective and popular representation of the new aesthetic and pedagogy of fascist Italy by the end of the 1920s. At that time, the fascist regime, having completely reformed all major sports institutions, subjecting them to the National Fascist Party (PNF), realized the need to create a new periodical able to both emphasize the political value of sport for fascism and underline its popular attitude and mission. This in particular was the editorial mission of the monthly review *Lo Sport Fascista*, founded in the spring of 1928 under the auspices of the chairman of CONI, Lando Ferretti, and the secretary general of PNF, Augusto Turati. As an official organ of the Italian sports movement and mouthpiece of its achievements, the magazine deserves special focus for at least three reasons: it helped to make some disciplines, such as football and cycling, extraordinarily popular in Italy, thus creating the conditions for their real exploit in the 1930s; it was able to combine propaganda and information in a truly original and unique way within the editorial offer of that time; and it fostered the myth of the great champions, turning sporting celebrities into ambassadors of fascism worldwide. The goal of this paper is to show in detail these features of the magazine, underlining its identity as a popular product, through a twofold analysis, one that is both aesthetic and political.

KEYWORDS

Italian Fascism, sport, propaganda, popular, champions, *Lo Sport Fascista*

In Italy during the 1920s, Fascism aided in the development of an awareness of the importance of sports, on political, propagandistic, and socio-cultural levels.¹ This process proceeded at a relatively rapid pace, from 1923 to 1928, thanks to work done, in particular, by Francesco Saverio Grazioli, chairman of the Royal Commission on Physical Education, Augusto Turati, general secretary of the National Fascist Party (PNF), and Leandro Arpinati, leader of the Fascist Party and *podestà* in Bologna during his term as chairman of the Italian National Football Federation (FIGC).² In this six-year period, the Mussolini Cabinet was in fact able to advance a general reform of public education — and of physical education in particular — with the achievement of the widest possible consensus among the ranks of the sportsmen. This consisted of the overall reorganization of the main national sports institution, the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI) — which was definitively subjected to PNF control in 1927 — and the foundation of important mass organizations, such as the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro (OND) and Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB), as well as the launch of an elaborate plan for the construction of sports facilities.³

The climax of this political season was symbolically characterized by the popular enthusiasm aroused in Italy and in Europe by Ottavio Bottecchia's exploits in the 1923, 1924, and 1925 Tours de France, Bottecchia being the first Italian cyclist to win the most important cycling competition in the world in 1924, and by the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris, with 3,076 athletes representing 44 countries.⁴ It was then that Mussolini became fully aware of the importance that sports had acquired on political, social, economic, and cultural levels in most developed countries. This fueled the need for a well-structured, broad, and articulated intervention by the Fascist regime in a sector that could not only guide popular tastes and habits, but influence the consensus of the masses. Established in 1928, the monthly magazine *Lo Sport Fascista* was one of the most significant and interesting fruits of this season, at a time in which sports activities and rituals were considered essential for the stabilization and the prestige of Fascism.⁵

- 1 Paul Dietschy and Stefano Pivato, *Storia dello sport in Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2019), pp. 61–135; Enrico Landoni, *Gli atleti del duce: La politica sportiva del fascismo 1919–1939* (Milano–Udine: Mimesis, 2016), pp. 33–128; *Sport e fascismo*, ed. by Maria Canella and Sergio Giuntini (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2009); Patrizia Dogliani, *Il fascismo degli italiani: Una storia sociale* (Torino: UTET, 2008), pp. 106–70; Felice Fabrizio, *Sport e fascismo: La politica sportiva del regime, 1924–1936* (Rimini–Firenze: Guaraldi, 1976), pp. 15–81.
- 2 Marcello Gallian, *Arpinati politico e uomo di sport* (Roma: Casa editrice Pinciana, 1928); Brunella Dalla Casa, *Leandro Arpinati: Un fascista anomalo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013); Stefano Cavazza, 'Miti e consenso durante il fascismo', in *Storia di Bologna: Bologna in età contemporanea 1915–2000*, ed. by Angelo Varni (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2013), pp. 439–92.
- 3 Enrico Landoni, 'Mussolini alla scoperta di un mondo nuovo: la genesi della politica sportiva del fascismo (1923–1928)', in *Storia e sport: Uno sguardo sul XX secolo*, ed. by Luigi Vergallo (Milano: Biblion, 2017), pp. 33–60; Enrico Landoni, *La ginnastica sale in cattedra: L'educazione fisica nell'ordinamento scolastico italiano dall'Unità ad oggi* (Milano: l'Ornitorinco, 2011), pp. 49–72; Carmen Betti, *L'Opera Nazionale Balilla e l'educazione fascista* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1984); Victoria De Grazia, *Consenso e cultura di massa nell'Italia fascista: L'organizzazione del dopolavoro* (Roma–Bari: Laterza, 1981); Mauro Pasqualini, 'La Juventud Modelo del fascismo italiano: educación física, discurso médico y culto del cuerpo en la Opera Nazionale Balilla, 1930–1937', *Historia Social*, 82 (2015), 49–72; Alessio Gagliardi, 'Controlar o tempo livre: a Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro na Itália fascista', in *Controle dos corpos e das mentes: Estratégias de dominação dos regimes fascistas e autoritários* (Rio de Janeiro–São Paulo: Arquivo Nacional–USP, 2019), pp. 170–91.
- 4 Landoni, *Gli atleti del duce*, pp. 110–33.
- 5 Daniele Serapiglia, 'Controle das massas e sociedade de consumo: o mito do futebol fascista', in *Controle dos corpos e das mentes*, pp. 282–95; Saverio Battente, 'Sport di squadra, consenso e tempo libero in Italia durante il ventennio fascista: il caso della pallacanestro', in *Tempo libero, sport e fascismo*, ed. by Daniele Serapiglia (Bologna: BraDypUS, 2016), pp. 93–108; Stefano Cavazza, 'Oratori populistici? Riflessioni sul rapporto tra leader e masse nei fascismi', in *Fare storia politica: Studi dedicati a Paolo Pombeni*, ed. by Riccardo Brizzi and others (Roma: Viella, 2018), pp. 29–55; Gino Germani, *Authoritarianism, Fascism and National Populism* (New Brunswick: Transaction books, 1978), p. 235.

Why a New Magazine?

In Italy, especially towards the end of the 1920s, a lot of sports newspapers were born. Together with the first and most authoritative national sports newspaper, *La Gazzetta dello Sport* (founded in 1896), *Olimpionica* (1927–29), *Gran Sport* (1929–34), *Il Coni* (1929–31), *La Palestra Fascista* (1928–31), *Tutti gli Sports* (1924–29), and *La Bicicletta* (1924–29) all contributed to the promotion of Italian sport culture and the description of its developments and achievements as peculiar features of Italian national identity.⁶ However, according to the regime, what was still missing was a newspaper that both represented and expressed the official voice of power regarding sport and the positive discontinuity that Fascism claimed to create in the history of the national sports movement. To these ends, *Lo Sport Fascista* was founded in the spring of 1928 under the direct auspices of the chairman of CONI, Lando Ferretti, and Augusto Turati. It was conceived of as an illustrated monthly review, just as its subtitle *Rassegna Mensile Illustrata* indicated, focusing on Italian sports as a popular mass movement, as underlined by the secretary general of the PNF in the first issue of this new magazine:

I am pleased to see the birth of this magazine, *Lo Sport Fascista*: the illustration of an activity that has produced remarkable results, especially as regards the dissemination of sport among the masses. If the magazine is — as it is to be considered — a remarkable publication in terms of size and technique, it will constitute the non-ephemeral documentation of what has been done by all sports organizations, of which someone wrongly does not sufficiently recognize the importance and the educational function. I hope that *Lo Sport Fascista* will also remember all those who have worked and believed in sport, in times of great and growing skepticism: the old but not forgotten pioneers.⁷

According to the regime, sport had become central to Fascist politics and to Italy itself, representing, as can be read in the editorial debut by editor-in-chief, Lando Ferretti, ‘a new aesthetic and a new pedagogy, far from the materialistic or doctrinal aberrations of other peoples’.⁸ Unlike other magazines in the Italian market, *Lo Sport Fascista* went beyond merely chronicling and analyzing sports events, to emphasize the relationship between sport and politics as well as the demiurgic function performed by the Fascist regime on the cultural and promotional levels. As Ferretti wrote,

in Italy, we must declare that Fascism does not yet have a magazine that is its high expression and worthy of its sport [...]. We have excellent newspapers in which

6 Landoni, *Gli atleti del duce*, pp. 108–11; Riccardo Grozio, *Mass-media, propaganda e immaginario durante il fascismo*, in *Sport e fascismo*, ed. by M. Canella and S. Giuntini, pp. 181–96; Maddalena Carli, ‘*Olimpionica*: Tra fascistizzazione e italianizzazione dello sport nella propaganda fascista dei tardi anni Venti’, *Memoria e Ricerca*, 27 (2008), 79–89; Paolo Murialdi, *La stampa del regime fascista* (Roma–Bari: Laterza, 1986), pp. 225–34; Paolo Facchinetti, *La stampa sportiva in Italia* (Bologna: Alfa, 1966), pp. 50–75; *Le prime pagine de ‘La Gazzetta dello Sport’: Le emozioni, i protagonisti, le sfide: dalla nascita fino alla XXX Olimpiade*, ed. by Elio Trifari and Franco Arturi (Milano: Rizzoli, 2012).

7 ‘Vedo con piacere nascere questa rivista, “Lo Sport Fascista”: la illustrazione di una attività che ha dato dei risultati notevoli soprattutto per quanto si riferisce alla diffusione dello sport nelle grandi masse. Se la rivista sarà — come è da ritenersi — una pubblicazione notevole per mole e tecnica, essa costituirà la documentazione non effimera di ciò che è stato compiuto da tutte le organizzazioni sportive, di cui — a torto — qualcuno non riconosce sufficientemente l’importanza e la funzione educativa. Spero che “Lo Sport Fascista” ricorderà anche tutti coloro che hanno operato e creduto nello sport, nei tempi del grande, montante scetticismo: i vecchi ma non dimenticati preparatori.’ ‘Messaggio del Segretario del Partito’, *Lo Sport Fascista*, 1 (1928), 1–2. All translations from the Italian are the author’s.

8 ‘una nuova estetica ed una nuova pedagogia, lontane dalle aberrazioni materialistiche o dottrinarie di altri popoli’. Lando Ferretti, ‘Programma’, *Lo Sport Fascista*, 1 (1928), 3–4 (p. 4).

the chronicles of events are paraded; good bimonthly or weekly publications that fix in image the memory of the changing and varied sport story. But in vain we look for the publication that deals with the great problems aroused by sport, in its overwhelming development, that reveals its origins in time and fortunes in space, that sets its tasks for the future. It is missing, especially, *non-ephemeral documentation*, as Augusto Turati wrote, with a lapidary sentence, in his greeting [...]. Non-ephemeral documentation: that is, something that speaks to the most distant peoples, today and to future generations; that says, forever, how, in a bright spring, Italian youth has awakened from the long drowsiness, straightening up in the joy of the sun, glad and proud for the victories of the athletes, backs curved by vice and renunciation.⁹

Beyond propaganda, it was evident that the novelty consisted in considering sports in the framework of wider political discourse, coordinating it with all that was happening in Italy under the aegis of the regime at that time. Ferretti also emphasized that the voices to be heard in *Lo Sport Fascista* would be first person accounts of past and present sports experts:

The magazine wants to be a modest codicil to the great poem that Mussolini's Italy writes with action; and, because its pages will never be a cold expression of abstract criticism, it will be written only by those who have been, in various ways, protagonists of that action. Hierarchs of the great organization that takes place; pool and stadium builders; champions of the past who brought the victorious name of Italy to the world in bad times; daring specialists, fearless record-setters, scientists who understand the civil function of sport: these are the collaborators of *Lo Sport Fascista*. Here it is not a challenge for professional sophists [...]. But here there is only the will to do something useful, and possibly beautiful [...].¹⁰

As usual, the model here was Mussolini himself, whose myth adopted the masculine traits of the overall sportsman:

Within the framework of the great revolution of the Genius, this page is a short, obscure commentary on an aspect of the historic event: it tends to prove that the Fascist conception of sport is not the fruit of words but of work and deeds, inspired by the solemn warnings of Rome and the Renaissance; this is the purest tradition of our people that yesterday's men had forgotten and deferred to exotic theories and that 'Il Duce'

9 'in Italia, dobbiamo dichiarare che il Fascismo non ha ancora una rivista che sia l'espressione alta e degna del suo sport [...] Abbiamo ottimi quotidiani sui quali sfilano le cronache degli avvenimenti; buone pubblicazioni ebdomadarie o quindicinali che fissano nell'immagine il ricordo della mutevole e varia vicenda sportiva. Ma invano si cerca la pubblicazione che tratti i grandi problemi suscitati dallo sport, nel suo travolgente sviluppo, ne sveli le origini nel tempo e le fortune nello spazio, ne fissi i compiti per l'avvenire. Manca, specialmente, una *documentazione non effimera* — come, con frase lapidaria, ha scritto nel suo saluto Augusto Turati [...]. Documentazione non effimera: che parli, cioè, ai popoli più lontani, oggi, ed alle generazioni che verranno domani; che dica, per sempre, come, in una primavera luminosa, La gioventù d'Italia si sia risvegliata dal suo sopore, raddrizzando nella gioia del sole, arrendente alle vittorie degli atleti, le schiene curvate dal vizio e dalla rinuncia.' Lando Ferretti, 'Programma', *Lo Sport Fascista*, 1 (1928), 3–4 (p. 3).

10 'La rivista vuole essere un modesto codicillo al grande poema che l'Italia di Mussolini scrive con l'azione; e, perché mai le sue pagine siano fredda espressione di critica da tavolino, sarà redatta soltanto da coloro che di quell'azione siano stati, in vario modo, protagonisti. Gerarchi della grande organizzazione che si attua; edificatori di piscine e di stadi; campioni del passato che portarono per il mondo il nome vittorioso d'Italia in tristezza di tempi; tecnici arditi, intrepidi conquistatori di «record»; scienziati che intendono la civile funzione dello sport: ecco i collaboratori dello *Sport Fascista*. Qui non è lizza per sofisti di professione [...]. Ma qui, solo, volontà di fare qualcosa di utile e, possibilmente, di bello [...].' Lando Ferretti, 'Programma', *Lo Sport Fascista*, 1 (1928), 3–4 (p. 4).

has rediscovered and revived with modernity. 'Il Duce', aviator, fencer, knight; 'Il Duce', the first sportsman in Italy. To Him, the one who deigned to grant himself a viaticum more precious than any other and gave the magazine his proud image of dominator, 'Lo Sport Fascista' promises that, whatever the value and fate of the new pages may be, united are the motto, the program, the faith and the flag: Loyalty.¹¹

A Particular Mix of Information and Propaganda

Turati and Ferretti intended *Lo Sport Fascista* to be a popular magazine, its target audience consisting of the growing 'army' of sportsmen and sports fans. Magazine sales and subscriptions grew considerably among their ranks, especially during the 1930s, when Italian athletes were obtaining the most prestigious international successes ever, including second place in the final medal table achieved by the Italian selection at the Los Angeles Olympic Games of 1932. According to its editorial mission, *Lo Sport Fascista* strove to be the flywheel, the pivot — or rather, the catalyst — for the popular revolution represented by the ongoing modernization of sports and the birth of a 'sports nation', which, according to Vittorio Varale, was underpinned by a rapid growth in the number of athletes, fans, and sports facilities, particularly at the end of the Twenties.¹² In order to accomplish this mission, the new magazine reported in detail on these events and developments, thus paying homage to the regime's sensitivities and commitment. That is why it focused, for instance, on the symbolic and political values embodied by athletes, architectural achievements, and general reorganization, which affected all branches of the sports movement; it intended to become a fundamental pawn of that allegedly perfect chessboard upon which the regime wanted to transform Italian society.

In line with this mission, the most important feature of *Lo Sport Fascista* was the peculiar synthesis of information and propaganda. There is ample evidence of this particular mixture, in both content and overall visual and editorial features of the new magazine. Within one issue, lavish praise of Mussolini and the Fascist hierarchy could be found alongside in-depth technical and cultural analyses. In the October 1928 issue, for example, an opening article about relations between the regime and the sports press and an article remembering sports 'martyrs' fallen during World War I were juxtaposed with a short essay on football trainer by Vittorio Pozzo, journalist and trainer of the Italian national football team, which won the World Cup in 1934 and 1938, the International Cup in 1930 and 1935 and the gold medal at the 1936 Olympic Games, and an investigation by Manfredi Oliva on the potentialities of Italian horse racing.¹³

Similarly, in the following issue, there was a marked contrast between, on the one hand, Augusto Parboni's article celebrating Fascist achievements in sport facilities, such as stadiums, the Foro Mussolini (Foro Italico since the fall of the Fascist regime),

11 'Nel quadro della grande rivoluzione del Genio, questo foglio è un piccolo, oscuro commentario di un aspetto dello storico evento: esso tende a provare come la concezione fascista dello sport non sia frutto di parole ma di opere, ispirata ai solenni ammonimenti di Roma e della Rinascenza, cioè alla tradizione più pura di nostra gente che gli uomini d'ieri avevano obliata e posposta alle teorie esotiche e che il Duce ha ritrovata e avvivata di modernità. Il Duce aviatore, schermidore, m cavaliere; il Duce sportivo d'Italia. A Lui, che si degnò concedergli come viatico più d'ogni altro ambito la sua fiera immagine di dominatore, *Lo Sport Fascista* promette che, qualunque sia il valore e la sorte delle nuove pagine, uno è il motto, il programma, la fede e la bandiera: Fedeltà.' Lando Ferretti, 'Programma', *Lo Sport Fascista*, 1 (1928), 3–4 (p. 4).

12 Vittorio Varale, 'Verso la nazione sportiva', *Lo Sport Fascista*, 2 (1930), 1–2.

13 'La stampa sportiva e il regime', *Lo Sport Fascista*, 5 (1928), 1–2; Vittorio Varale, 'Nel decennio della Vittoria ricordiamo il contributo dato dallo sport alla guerra ed esaltiamo il sacrificio degli Sportivi caduti sul campo di battaglia', 41–49; Vittorio Pozzo, 'Il mestiere del trainer', 24–27; Manfredi Oliva, 'Liberismo o protezionismo?', 88–92.

Campi Sportivi del Littorio, and the High School of Physical Education,¹⁴ and sports institutions, more particularly CONI and the Football Federation, following the Carte di Viareggio reform,¹⁵ and, on the other hand, Giuseppe Ambrosini's inquiry into the problems and the potential — including the touristic one — of Italian cycling, the most popular sport in Italy, along with football.¹⁶

This editorial pattern also characterized the January 1929 issue. The opening article was dedicated to the celebration of the regime and the presentation of one of the most important Fascist documents, the Charter of Sport, which provided each Fascist organization with specific tasks and targets in sports, according to a wider and more organic strategy, described as follows:

Everyone can see how the complex programme imposed by the general secretary of PNF and high commissioner of the CONI had a first implementation with the Charter of Sport. This first act — a work that orientates and reorganizes the different institutions operating up to yesterday in different fields through an artificial structure, based on duplication, interference, expensive and useless energy consumption — is only 'a first step'.

With clear vision the Head of Sport has faced the problem of the framing, while right now he is studying other equally important ones, and I believe that we will soon have relevant news about them. What was most urgent, what needed to be dealt with immediately [...], has already been implemented. This is therefore the first application of the programme launched [...] at Palazzo Littorio.¹⁷

This article, full of glorifying remarks, was followed by more factual in-depth pieces on the development of trotting races in Italy and the technical and tactical features of ice hockey.¹⁸

By the same token, the June 1929 issue celebrating the first year of activity of the periodical opened with Vittorio Varale's article on the popular relevance of sport for the new Italian way of life, as conceived by the regime. This contrasted, in terms

14 Alessio Ponzio, *La palestra del Littorio: L'Accademia della Farnesina: un esperimento di pedagogia totalitaria nell'Italia fascista* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2009); Amedeo D'Albora, 'I Campi Sportivi del Littorio', *Lo Sport Fascista*, 1 (1928), 75–76; Marcos Guterman, 'Estádios como palco de celebração do poder: Os ideais autoritários na arquitetura dos estádios do Pacaembu (São Paulo), do Estádio Olímpico (Berlim) e do Foro Itálico', in *Tempo libero, sport e fascismo*, ed. by Daniele Serapiglia (Bologna: BraDypUS, 2016), pp. 51–64.

15 Antonio Papa and Guido Panico, *Storia sociale del calcio in Italia: Dai club dei pionieri alla nazione sportiva, 1887–1945* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993), pp. 130–144; Enrico Landoni, *Un secolo da protagonisti: I primi cento anni di storia del movimento arbitrale italiano (1911–2011)* (Angiari: Grafiche Marchesini, 2011), pp. 29–34.

16 Augusto Parboni, 'Lo sport nella concezione fascista', *Lo Sport Fascista*, 6 (1928), 1–5; Giuseppe Ambrosini, 'Il ciclismo è in decadenza?', 59–65; Enrico Landoni, 'Regime e ciclismo: ai margini o ai vertici dello sport nazionale?', in *Il Giro d'Italia e la società italiana*, ed. by Gianni Silei (Manduria–Bari–Roma: Lacaita, 2010), pp. 125–154; Daniele Marchesini, *L'Italia del Giro d'Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996); Simon Martin, *Football and Fascism: The national game under Mussolini* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).

17 'Ognuno vede come il complesso programma impostosi dal Segretario del Partito e Commissario del C.O.N.I. abbia avuto una prima attuazione con la Carta dello Sport. Questo primo fatto — opera di orientamento e disciplinarmente delle varie forze fino all'altro giorno operanti in campo diverso attraverso una struttura artificiosa, a base di duplicazioni, di interferenze, di dispendio costoso di energie, non è che un "primo passo". Con chiara visione il Capo dello Sport ha affrontato il problema dell'inquadramento, mentre altri problemi non meno importanti egli ha già allo studio, e dei quali, io ritengo, si avrà presto notizia. Quello che più urgeva, quella che era una necessità impellente [...], si è già attuata. È dunque la prima applicazione della enunciazione del programma esposto nella riunione [...] a Palazzo Littorio.' 'La Carta dello Sport', *Lo Sport Fascista*, 1 (1929), 1–2 (p. 2). Palazzo Littorio was a metaphor for the PNF.

18 Manfredi Oliva, 'Lo sviluppo del trotto in Italia', 92–97; Decio Trovati, 'La tecnica dell'hockey su ghiaccio', 107–10.

of tone and content, with Angelo Sarno's subsequent exposition on the importance of handicap in horse races.¹⁹ It can therefore be said that it was the mixture of propaganda and information that allowed the magazine to be popular. Indeed, it appealed to both experts and fans, who could both enjoy the chronicle of sports events (and the related pictures) and improve their level of technical competence on the sport of their choice.

For the Promotion of Sport and its Culture

By giving ample space to these in-depth articles, unhindered by propaganda requirements, which the magazine obviously included in order to satisfy its role as the official sport organ of the regime, *Lo Sport Fascista* fostered the promotion, diffusion, and, above all, popularity of many sports beyond football and cycling, such as fencing, boxing, swimming, rowing, and gymnastics. Despite the limitations imposed by its political and editorial role, the magazine cast new light onto Italian sports culture, its values, and specific identity. Although the dissemination of this new image of sport and emphasis on its importance responded to political needs and propaganda purposes, the work done by the journalists of *Lo Sport Fascista* displayed a high level of creativity and innovation, as they dealt effectively with the grayness and heaviness of censorship checks and political pressure, while conveying to the growing audience of sport fans a positive and sincere message, which can be easily summarized as follows: choose the discipline most suited and congenial to you and get going.²⁰ Sport helps spirit and body.

The campaign in favour of sports was supported by testimonials — by sports champions, sports managers, and medical doctors — who were invited by the magazine to not only talk about their relationship to sports but, above all, to choose and recommend a particular sport, answering the following questions: 'What do you think is the sport which can help youth better and more fully reach their moral and physical strength? Why? After your favourite one, that which you consider most suitable, which other sports do you think this education should include?' Among the respondents was Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the ideological founder of Futurism and, at the time, active supporter of Benito Mussolini, who replied: 'I prefer swimming of all sports because it is the most suitable for freeing muscles and thinking. Then football, because it contains the double pleasure of running and war'.²¹ Not by chance, this sort of answer strengthened the very mix of information (swimming would be 'most suitable for freeing muscles') and propaganda (through the reference to militarism) that characterized the magazine. All responses were gathered in a dossier under the title 'The Investigations of *Lo Sport Fascista*', which was published in the May 1929 issue, embellished with a captivating and modern graphic design. This variety also boosted the popular features of the magazine. Every potential reader could find a suitable sport, one he or she loved and that could be practiced. Also through the periodical, sport was becoming something for everyone.

The Great Champion

From the Thirties onwards, this attitude towards sport contributed to fostering the myth of the great champions, as also celebrated by the case of a further magazine, *Il Calcio Illustrato*, another interesting sport and editorial endeavor founded in Milan in 1931 by

19 Vittorio Varale, 'Lo Sport problema di Stato', *Lo Sport Fascista*, 6 (1929), 1–6; Angelo Sarno, 'Discussioni di ippica: l'handicap', 87–90.

20 Maurizio Cesari, *La censura nel periodo fascista* (Napoli: Liguori, 1978).

21 'Le inchieste di *Sport Fascista*', *Lo Sport Fascista*, 5 (1929), 33–48 (p. 33).

Marco Vaccari and managed by Leone Boccali, further confirming the great vivacity of the sector.²² From the propagandistic point of view, creating new myths was essential to enhancing the prestige of the regime as it turned famous sportsmen into ambassadors of Fascism. Examples include cyclist Alfredo Binda, sports motorcycle and car driver Tazio Nuvolari, and football player Giuseppe Meazza, who was given, as a direct link to the regime (and more specifically the ONB), the nickname 'Balilla'.²³ This word means little boy in Genoese dialect, recalling the nickname of Giovanni Battista Perasso who, in a very patriotic way, started the 1746 revolt against the Habsburg army, which was occupying Genoa. Since that moment, Perasso, that is Balilla, has become one of the most important symbols of the struggle of the Italian people for independence and Italian unification.

From the perspective of everyday life, *Lo Sport Fascista* played a decisive role in boosting a healthy enthusiasm and sincere passion for some champions and some disciplines in particular. In this regard, the case of boxing was emblematic. In the early Thirties, the undisputed hero of this sport was Primo Carnera, to whom *Lo Sport Fascista* dedicated a special article signed by the physician Giovanni Pini in the December 1930 issue.²⁴ The scientist emphasized Carnera's physiological exceptionality as follows:

I notice his *vital capacity*, which is the volume of air emitted after deep inhalation. This capacity has reached the height of 9,000 cubic centimeters. If one realizes that exceptionally strong men hardly reach 7,000 centimetres, one can be convinced that Carnera's lung capacity reaches a height more unique than rare. At the same time, his rib cage's expansion approaches 20 centimeters, while it normally never reaches 15 centimetres, even in athletes with a very well developed chest [...]. Finally, the average perimeter of the contraction muscle (forearm, arm, thigh, leg) deserves to be remembered, as it is on average 49 — that is 8–9 centimetres higher than the average of great athletes. These data let us deduce that, according to the usual physical and mechanical evaluations one must inevitably acknowledge, our Carnera is not only a phenomenon because of his body mass, but also an exception as regards his strength.²⁵

As this excerpt demonstrates, Carnera, whose symbolic, political, and diplomatic role was also very important in the United Kingdom, as well as in the United States of America (where he was nicknamed 'The Walking Mountain'), was celebrated firstly on a scientific level and then as an unbeatable sport champion. His exploits in the ring were analyzed and, so to speak, justified by medical science, which thus certified his uniqueness, giving the athlete the label of 'authentic phenomenon'.

22 Enrico Landoni, 'Un periodico sportivo: *Il Calcio Illustrato*', in *Forme e modelli del rotocalco italiano tra fascismo e guerra*, ed. by Raffaele De Berti and Irene Piazzoni (Milano: Cisalpino-Monduzzi Editoriale, 2009), pp. 343–75.

23 John Foot, *Winning At All Costs. The Untold Story of Triumph, Tragedy and Corruption in Italian Soccer* (New York: Nation books, 2007), pp. 10–149.

24 Daniele Marchesini, *Carnera* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006).

25 [Rilevo la sua *capacità vitale*, cioè la cubatura d'aria emessa dopo una profonda inspirazione, capacità che ha raggiunto l'altissima cifra di 9000 centimetri cubici. Se si pensa che uomini eccezionalmente forti raggiungono con le difficoltà i 7000, ci si convince che la capienza polmonare di Carnera raggiunge un'altezza più unica che rara. Parallelamente l'espansione della cassa toracica tocca il 20 centimetri, mentre normalmente non arriva mai al 15, anche in atleti al torace è molto sviluppato. [...] Da ultimo merita di essere anche ricordata la media dei perimetri muscolari in contrazione (avambraccio, braccio, coscia, gamba) media che è stata in centimetri 49, superiore di 8-9 centimetri alla media dei grandi atleti. Da questi dati si deduce che alla stregua delle consuete valutazioni fisiche e meccaniche è giuoco forza riconoscere che il nostro non è soltanto un fenomeno come massa, ma anche una eccezione come forza.] Giovanni Pini, 'Il fenomeno Carnera', *Lo Sport Fascista*, 12 (1930), 5–9 (p. 8).

This very pragmatic content contrasts with the way in which Giuseppe Ambrosini talked about the final results of the Giro d'Italia (Tour of Italy) in the June 1931 issue:

But the Giro d'Italia wanted to give us the most beautiful and precious thing that a great race can give us: the revelation of an authentic value, the consecration of a young athlete's potential, class and talent. Until last year, we knew that Camusso was an amateur and independent among the best climbers — generous and reckless, but subject, as it is natural among young cyclists who dare too much, to clear and irreparable collapses over 150 and 200 kilometers [...]. His temper was still missing [...]. Actually this temper had already appeared in the Tre Valli Varesine circuit, but it was definitively confirmed by Giro d'Italia. His 130-kilometer-breakaway from Sestrières to Turin is enough, after ten tight stages, to convince us that he has reached a high level of endurance. [...]

And now that our greatest cycling event has seen its triumphant epilogue, demonstrating its inexhaustible propaganda resources, we have only to wish that the hopes of the well-deserving organizers come true, that is, to emphasize the challenge between our best exponents and those of other nations as the key-element of Giro d'Italia. I mean a real Team Tour, which actually represents the different national cycling schools. This is the dream of Italian sportspeople.

Ambrosini tended to emphasize the figure and the achievements of the cyclist, pulling the strings of romanticism and passion in order to strengthen the myth of the great sport champion.²⁶ By telling the story of past competitions and even the personal life of a champion, Ambrosini employed effective simplicity in order to arouse the interest of readers and of a wider audience interested in sport, inviting bicycle fans to identify themselves with their idol of the moment. Both ways of writing an article — the more actual and factual, on the one hand, and the more passionate and subjective, on the other — certainly contributed to the popularity of *Lo Sport Fascista* as it was able to strike the right notes for several kinds of readers.

Conclusions

Lo Sport Fascista constitutes an interesting case study within the Italian journalistic panorama of the Fascist period, considering the peculiarity represented by its editorial model and, above all, the political and symbolic roles that sport played in Italian society; it affected tastes, habits, and behaviors and willingly shaped a new prototype for the Italian citizen, obedient and loyal to Mussolini and the regime, but at the same time

26 [Ma il Giro, oltre tutto, ha voluto darci anche quello che di più bello e prezioso può darci una grande corsa, la rivelazione di un autentico valore, la consacrazione della classe di un giovane. Fino all'anno scorso conoscevamo un Camusso, dilettante e indipendente fra i migliori in salita, generoso e temerario, ma soggetto, come è naturale dei giovani che osano troppo, a tracolli netti e irrimediabile oltre i 150 e 200 chilometri. [...] Ma gli mancava ancora la temprà [...]. Questa temprà si era rivelata in Camusso già nel Circuito delle tre valli varesine, ma si è definitivamente confermata nel Giro d'Italia. Basta la sua fuga di 130 chilometri dal Sestrières a Torino, dopo dieci tappe ben tirate, per convincerci che egli ha raggiunto una elevata dotazione di fondo. [...] Ed ora che la nostra maggiore manifestazione ciclistica ha visto il suo trionfale epilogo, che ha dimostrato le sue inesauste risorse propagandistiche, che ha prospettato originali e interessanti aspetti della nuova situazione nazionale, non ci rimane che da augurarci la realizzazione del progetto vagheggiato dai benemeriti organizzatori, quello, cioè, di porre a centro della competizione il confronto dei nostri migliori esponenti con quelli delle altre nazioni. Un Giro a squadre veramente rappresentative nazionali; ecco il sogno che vagheggiano gli sportivi italiani.] Giuseppe Ambrosini, 'Giro d'Italia', *Lo Sport Fascista*, 6 (1931), 27–33 (pp. 31, 33).

free and creative.²⁷ The journal's main strength was the juxtaposition and co-presence of propaganda and information: neither propaganda nor the chronicling of sports events alone would have attracted the reader per se, but the mixture of the two — order and creativity, politics and culture, great technical insight and rhetorical conformism, flamboyance and objective style — captivated the readers. *Lo Sport Fascista* was a popular periodical because it effectively targeted readers with both the most conformist and obsequious attitudes towards the regime, as well as people who truly aspired to become sportsmen and be well-informed on sports-related topics. *Lo Sport Fascista* also deserves this label because it was able to offer interesting news and useful opportunities to every kind of sports lover and reader. Its innovative character was also supported by the use of images and graphics, which enhanced not only its overall dynamism, but, above all, its informative and promotional mission. Despite the many limitations highlighted in this article, until 1943 *Lo Sport Fascista* certainly represented a timely and complete review of the broad gamut of Italian sports, whose development, important per se, in any case had to go hand in hand with the overall growth of the prestige and fame of the Fascist regime and with the definitive affirmation of the Italian people on the international chessboard. That is why it acted as a sounding board for the regime, actually serving in all sincerity and with unquestionable competence the Italian sports movement and the popular taste and culture.

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