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The Use of Sports In the Teaching of Culture and Civilization: Spain as a Case Study¹

Juan Castillo

Introduction

Most methodological approaches to the teaching of culture and civilization for second language students tend to have two things in common. First, they put an emphasis in history and high culture: fine arts, literature and film.² Second, when they cover current events, they tend to take what I will call horizontal views of the civilization, trying to cover a wide spectrum of aspects of society, and not getting into an in-depth study of any of them.

This article wants to propose a different methodology on both counts. First, instead of focusing on high culture, I want to use an item of popular culture to illustrate a certain civilization.³ Second, this article proposes a radically vertical view, which will center around a very specific aspect of the country's culture.

More specifically, in this work I will attempt to use sports as a way to understand the culture and civilization of Spain. Although for a long time sports were ostracized from most intellectual studies, recently we have seen more attention paid to them in fields such as business, sociology, anthropology and media studies. I believe that sports and the spectatorship that they generate are so widespread that they offer unlimited windows into society as a whole. In this article I will focus exclusively on Spain, but this point of view can undoubtedly be extended to many other Latin countries, in the case of the teaching of Spanish, and to most Western countries for many other languages.

This article will look at several ways in which sports provide a significant representation of Spanish culture and civilization. I will cover issues such as the media, the ways that Spaniards see themselves, political symbols and conflicts, and the status of certain social groups. I do not believe that such a view stands in competition with the more accepted horizontal views that focus on history and high culture. Rather the intention is to provide an alternative and complementary approach, as well as a handful of useful examples for all views from an often over looked field. I hope that this journey through sports in Spain will offer at least some ideas that will help teachers of Spanish use this topic in a culture and civilization class.

¹ I want to thank the audience at the Iowa World Language Association 2005 for their comments and suggestions, especially Jennifer Cooley. An anonymous reviewer, wonders about the author's knowledge of Spanish culture and civilization. I was born in Spain and, even though I have lived in the U.S. since my early twenties, I have traveled back every year and have always tried my best to maintain a close contact with the life and culture of Spain. Of course, any mistakes, oversights or inappropriate generalizations found in this article are my own responsibility.

² See for instance Tamames and Quesada (2001), Ugarte et al. (2004).

³ A good example of this type of approach is Piemontese and Arboleda (2004).

1. Approaches to Teaching Culture and Civilization

Let us assume that the study of the culture and civilization of a country or region can be undertaken in one of two ways. There is a horizontal view, which would take all defining characteristics of that society and give examples of them across many different aspects of it, such as geography, demographics, politics, literature, etc. Under a horizontal view, none of those aspects would be studied in depth, but we would get an encyclopedic perspective of the society's character.

On the other hand, we could take a vertical view. If there are a series of characteristics that define a society, we can expect that those characteristics, in whole or in part, appear in different aspects of that society. Therefore, even if none of those separate aspects can give us a full picture of the society in question, they can serve as slices that reproduce at least some of those defining characteristics. In a vertical view, we would look at a single aspect of the society, and study all of its defining characteristics that appear in that specific aspect. It is likely that not all the characteristics would find adequate representations in this concrete aspect, but in exchange we would get a much deeper study of this slice of society.

Obviously, both the horizontal and vertical views have their pros and cons, but it is worthwhile to study them both. The two views are complementary and thus mutually necessary. Without vertical studies, there would be no concrete examples to offer under a horizontal view. At the same time, a vertical view would not know what to look for in its slice of society if horizontal studies had not provided general characteristics to start with.

Yet, when it comes to teaching culture and civilization, it is more common to find horizontal than vertical views. I believe that vertical views can be especially appealing to students who have a personal interest in the aspect of society under study. Besides, a vertical view allows us to go into great depth in aspects of society that otherwise would be only seen in a very superficial manner.

This article proposes a vertical view of the culture and civilization of Spain, using sports as a case study. We can find numerous studies in fields such as sports anthropology and sociology of sports that look at how certain general ideas in Spanish society appear represented in sports,⁴ but their interest is mainly the study of a specific sport, mainly soccer.⁵ My point of view here is slightly different, because the focus is not sports themselves, but rather Spanish culture and civilization. This study aspires to be an inquiry into Spanish society as a whole and how the world of sports represents it.

I would like to start with a quote from Crolley, Hand and Jeutter (1998):

...football is reflected by the (...) match reports studied as an extension of society in that so many of the images and metaphors used to describe it derive from (...) Spanish constructions of collective identity. (...) ...when we read a match report in (...) *El País*, we are highly likely to encounter imaginative and adventurous (re)constructions of (...) Spanish obsessions which, themselves, are rooted in (...) Spanish perceptions of their own collective national identity (184).

⁴ For instance, the studies of the treatment of soccer in Spanish media in Duke and Crolley (1996), Crolley, Hand and Jeutter (1998), Crolley and Hand (2002). Two interesting views of soccer in several societies, including Spain, are Seguro (ed. 1999) and Foer (2004). See also the histories of Spanish soccer in Shaw (1987), Fernández Santander (1990) and Ball (2003a). Finally, some books cover the history of specific football clubs, among them Burns (1999), Bahamonde (2002) and Ball (2003b).

⁵ Throughout the article I use football and soccer interchangeably to refer to the same sport. This article does not discuss American football.

This quote deals specifically with football, which incidentally in Spain is called the king of sports. Nevertheless, the message can be extended to sports in general. Throughout this article we will find numerous examples of those “Spanish obsessions” not only in football, but also in skiing, cycling or tennis, among others. However, my study will not limit itself to the consideration of media representations. I will also look at a multiplicity of collective constructs that popular imagination makes of everything that has to do with sports, be it events, institutions or celebrities.

I do not intend to give an exhaustive account of the relation between sports and Spanish society. My intention is to provide a preliminary look. Many examples presented here may be subject to interpretation and discussion. Yet, I believe that most of the cases discussed here are generally accepted in Spanish society as representative of those “collective obsessions” that Crolley et al. mention in the article cited above.

2. Sports in Spanish media

It is a well-known fact in Spain that its citizens do not like to read. A number of studies show that out of the fifteen countries in the European Union, the readership statistics placed Spain only above Portugal and Greece, in both reading of books and newspapers. In 2001, the percentage of Spaniards who had read a book in the previous year was around 47%, a low number compared to 80% in Sweden, and 75% in Finland and the United Kingdom (European Commission 2002).

The numbers for newspaper readership show an even larger gap. In 2003, 44% of Finns were newspaper buyers, followed by Sweden at 41% and Austria at 30%. Spain, once more, only led Portugal and Greece, with a low 10% of newspaper buyers (*El País*, February 27, 2003).

However, a look at the specific newspapers that Spaniards read provides further data. Table 1 shows a comparison between the ten most read dailies in the U.S. and in Spain:⁶

TABLE 1

Most read newspapers in USA	Most read newspapers in Spain
1. USA Today	1. Marca
2. Wall Street Journal	2. El País
3. New York Times	3. El Mundo
4. Los Angeles Times	4. AS
5. Washington Post	5. El Periódico
6. New York Daily News	6. ABC
7. Chicago Tribune	7. La Vanguardia
8. Newsday	8. El Mundo Deportivo
9. Houston Chronicle	9. Sport
10. New York Post	10. La Voz de Galicia

⁶ Sources: U.S.: Editor & Publisher International Year Book 2005; Spain: Estudio General de Medios 2004.

The difference between the two lists is readily evident. All the newspapers in the U.S. list cover general news, including the *Wall Street Journal*, in spite of its emphasis on the business world. Three of them appeal to national audiences (*USA Today*, *WSJ* and *Newsday*), while the rest are local newspapers, representative of the relative size of the major metropolitan areas in the country. Thus, we find newspapers from New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington and Houston. All these newspapers cover sports in one form or another, but it is not the central theme in any of them.

On the other hand, the Spanish list includes four newspapers exclusively dedicated to sports: two of them from Madrid (*Marca* and *As*), and two from Barcelona (*El Mundo Deportivo* and *Sport*), even though some of them issue regional editions. The general news dailies include three from Madrid (albeit with pretensions to have national coverage and audience, and with some regional editions as well), two from Barcelona, and one from La Coruña, in the Northwestern region of Galicia.

This data clearly shows how interested Spaniards are in sports. While it is true that people there do not read newspapers as frequently as their European neighbors, Table 1 is telling us that in reality it is general news dailies that Spaniards do not read so much. On the other hand, they seem to avidly read sports newspapers, even more so than Americans, who so often describe themselves as “crazy about sports.”

A look at television audience ratings in Spain provides similar results.⁷ In 2004, the three most watched shows were football games, and two more made the top ten list. Crucial qualifying games for the Spanish national team appear routinely among the most watched programs. Also at the top we can find the yearly King’s Cup final, and also decisive European Champions League matches, especially if Real Madrid is involved in them.

The way that Spaniards follow sports (and especially soccer) in the mass media is a sign of how important it is in this society. In fact, Spaniards seem willing to break with their own custom of ignoring newspapers as long as the main topic is sports. Therefore, I believe that ignoring sports when we are studying the culture and civilization of Spain would leave out an aspect of life that seems to matter very much to the subjects of the study. In fact, I intend to do just the opposite and focus on sports to see what else it can tell us about Spanish culture and society.

3. Sports figures and Spanish identity

Horizontal views of Spanish culture and civilization can provide us with general ways in which Spaniards see themselves. Their collective imagination has created an image of what a stereotypical Spaniard is, and the main characteristics of this imagined collective identity. Once we have identified a few of those characteristics, a vertical view of the culture such as the one undertaken here will ask what sports figures best represent those features of the perceived Spanish personality.

I recently asked a U.S. audience which adjectives they would use to define their collective national identity. They quickly replied with words such as resilient and self-confident. When asked what sports figures they identified with those adjectives, they did not need much time to provide the names of Lance Armstrong and Michael Jordan, respectively. Names such as these have come to embody the main characteristics of the American personality in the collective imagination of that country.

In this section of the article, I will inquire what are some of the features that Spaniards associate with themselves, and which sport celebrities best represent those facets of the perceived

⁷ The official audience ratings were found at: <http://www.marketingdirecto.com/estudios/estudio.php>.

collective national identity. To be concrete, I will focus on the three most famous characters from Spanish literature, namely Don Quijote, Sancho Panza and Don Juan, and the way that their personalities have come to be part of the collective Spanish imagination.⁸ Then, we will see what sports figures best identify with them in that collective imagination.

3.1. “Los españoles somos muy quiijotes” (“Spaniards are very quiijotes”)

The title above is an expression widely used in Spain, albeit in different contexts and with several possible connotations. Cervantes’ character is arguably the most universal one that has ever come out of any Spanish, maybe even human, literary work. Especially due to the writers of the so-called Generation of 1898, Don Quijote has become a metaphor for a series of characteristics that they claimed to be associated with the Spanish collective identity.⁹ When some Spaniards describe themselves as *quiijotes*, they are creating the image of a person committed to the pursuit of an ideal, against both common wisdom and rational logic. This use does not necessarily imply failure in this enterprise, even though the noun *quiijotada* seems to be more associated with it. In general, a *quiijote* is a person who, when it comes down to pursuing his or her dream, will not be dissuaded by any logical argument. Also, a *quiijote* never gets discouraged, no matter how hard the trials and difficulties along the way. Reaching the goal or not is to a certain extent accessory. What makes a *quiijote* is the attitude of defiance towards adversity and the perseverance to continue the fight.

The history of Spanish sports, especially at the time of Franco’s dictatorship (1939-1975), is full of pioneers who earned for themselves the *quiijote* brand for never ceasing to fight despite the difficulties. Many Spaniards from the recent generations know the names of cyclist Federico Martín Bahamontes, motorcyclist Angel Nieto, skier Francisco Fernández Ochoa, athlete Mariano Haro or tennis player Manuel Santana. All these names and others are commonly invoked by the Spanish press any time a Spaniard becomes the first to win in any sport.¹⁰

Federico Martín Bahamontes was the first Spaniard to win the Tour de France in 1959. He also held the record for the most wins in the King of the Mountain’s Trophy for the same race, with six, until Richard Virenque beat it in recent times. According to his brief biography by

Fuster de Carulla (2005), Bahamontes was born in a small town in Toledo in 1928. His father bought him his first bicycle, which meant a great economic effort for the family. Federico put it to good use, training by day and helping transport fruit at night. The young rider also had to overcome a chronic illness. The legend of *quiijote* Bahamontes starts when he was 25 years old, and he took part in his first race of any relevance, the Tour of Asturias. First, he had to ride his bicycle for three days and more than 400 miles from Toledo to Asturias, because he could not afford any other means of transportation. However, he won the King of the Mountain’s Trophy.

Even at the height of his career we can find an image that perfectly captures Bahamontes’ quixotic spirit. In 1960, a mere year after winning the Tour de France, Bahamontes had to retire

⁸ See Fox (1998) for a discussion of the role that these characters played in the development of Spanish nationalism and identity.

⁹ Fox (1998) studies the ideas of Don Quijote in authors such as Miguel de Unamuno, Valentí Almirall, Lucas Mallada, Joaquín Costa or José Ortega y Gasset.

¹⁰ For instance, after Fernando Alonso became the first Spaniard to win the Formula 1 World Championship, Spanish newspapers devoted important amounts of space to the remembrance of the same early pioneers, with headlines such as “Alonso Enters the ‘Pioneer Club’: Spaniards Who Made History” (*As*, 26 Sep 2005); “There is Always a First Time” (*ABC*, 26 Sep 2005); “Spain is a Country of Soloists” (*El País*, 26 Sep 2005); “*Alonso is a Pioneer Like Us*” (*El Mundo*, 27 Sep 2005).

while trying to retain his title. That day, the French daily *L'Equipe* took a photo of the still reigning champion sitting on a solitary platform at a station, waiting for the train that would take him back to Spain. And by his side, his only company; a suitcase and a bicycle.

Manuel Santana was a child of the Civil War that desolated Spain between 1936 and 1939. Born in 1938, in his autobiography, (Santana 2003) he tells us that his father had to spend six years in prison at the end of the war for having fought for the losing side. This basically made most of Santana's infancy part of a single parent home, with his mother having to take care of three other children. When he was ten, Santana started to work as a ball boy in a tennis club in Madrid, and his passion for the sport grew to the point that he started to sneak into matches with club members. Realizing Santana's potential, a rich member of the club took him as a foster child so that he could practice the sport. Eventually, Santana became one of the best amateur tennis players of his time, right before the Open era started with the merger of the pro and amateur circuits. He won Roland Garros (nowadays known as the French Open) twice, and once at Forest Hills (currently U.S. Open) and Wimbledon. His victory at the prestigious London tournament in 1966 still stands as the only time a Spanish man has won that championship. The Open era caught Santana at the end of his career and he retired shortly thereafter.

All of these *quijotes* had to make way for themselves at a time in which the promotion of sports among the youth was nil. Also, they all blazed the trail for others to follow. In cycling, Bahamontes' path was followed by Luis Ocaña, Pedro Delgado and Miguel Induráin, all winners of the Tour de France. More recently, Abraham Olano, Oscar Freire and Igor Astarloa have also won the Road Racing Cycling World Championships. In tennis, Santana's path was followed by Andrés Gimeno, Manuel Orantes, Sergi Bruguera, and a new generation, commonly called the *Armada*, which includes tennis players such as Carlos Moyá, Albert Costa, Juan Carlos Ferrero and Rafael Nadal.

The political transition that followed Franco's death allowed a vast improvement in the promotion of young athletes. Part of this promotion has been tied to Spain's involvement in the organization of the world's most important sporting events, including the Football World Cup in 1982, the World Championships in basketball in 1986 and Track and Field in 1999 and, above all, the Barcelona Olympics in 1992. To give a literal quote from a recent Spanish newspaper, Spain "doesn't need *quijotes* anymore".¹¹

The list of triumphs by Spaniards in these sports owes much to the propelling force of the initial *quijotes*. Despite the lack of precedents, and the non-existent help from the government, these pioneers refused to stop when they faced adversity and marked the path to follow for future generations. Their drive to achieve their dream made life a lot easier for the ones that succeeded them. This is why, in the collective imagination of many Spaniards, and in the words of some of the Spanish press, their histories reinforce the idea that being *quijotes* is a defining characteristic of the Spanish national identity.

3.2. Spaniards are very *sanchopanza* –“*Los españoles somos muy sanchopanzas.*”

It is curious that a character such as Sancho Panza, who plays nothing more than a supporting role in a novel about a madman, has so many sides to his personality. On the one hand, he is the pragmatist who has learnt all the street smarts. He is also a never ending source of popular knowledge, expressed in his sayings and proverbs. On the other hand, Sancho also represents the unambitious common man, who has no education, and loves his simple life, his siestas, his food and his wine.

¹¹ Sámano (2005): “ya no son precisos los quijotismos.”

When many Spaniards refer to themselves using the phrase in the title of this section, they rarely think of Sancho's positive qualities, and they rather talk about people who have no ambition or drive to achieve any glory. These are the Spaniards who have little education, never pick up a book to read, pride vacation time over work, and whose quiet lives will pass over the world without leaving a mark.

I can think of one case of *sanchopancismo* in Spanish sports: the national football team, popularly known as *la selección*. Football commentators around the world show their stupor regarding the case of the Spanish national team. On the one hand, the country is home to some of the best football clubs in the world, including Real Madrid, which was chosen by FIFA (International Football Federation) best club of the twentieth century.

On the other hand, *la selección* has had a disastrous career in national team competitions.¹² As far as World Cups go, Spain has only been able to reach the semi-finals once, in Brazil 1950, where they ended up in fourth position. In European Championships, at least Spain has one trophy in Madrid in 1964; since then, Spain has only been to one other final game, which they lost in France 1984. The history of *la selección* is laden with errors and misfortunes. Each generation has its own list of draws from a bowl, decisive goals, fatal mistakes or missed penalty kicks, that, like the list of quijotes with every new pioneer, are invoked any time the national team fails once again.¹³

In Rome, in 1954, after Spain and Turkey ended in a 2-2 draw the game that should have decided which team went to the World Cup, the two delegations met to find a way to decide the winner. A new match was out of the question, and the penalty kicks had not yet become the way to break a tie, so the two sides agreed to draw the names out of a bowl. An Italian boy called Franco Gemma played the innocent hand and, with his eyes covered, he drew Turkey's name. This episode is still remembered around the world as one of the most absurd ways that a team has ever been eliminated from a World Cup.

In 1984, in the European Championship played in France, Spain reached its second final, in which it had to face the host team. All went well until the referee called a doubtful free kick right at the edge of the Spanish penalty box. Michel Platini, the French star who seemed in a state of grace throughout the tournament, kicked the ball to the far post, but the Spanish goalkeeper Luis Arconada got there in time. Unfortunately, in front of the defenders and the equally horrified millions of Spanish fans watching on television, the ball somehow sneaked in under Arconada's body and barely crossed the goal line. The next day all the newspaper covers ran the picture of Arconada desperately trying to stop a ball that was already inside his goal. France won 2-0 and Spain has never been back to a final match in a major tournament.

The list continues in the Spanish fan's minds and the collective memory, always spurred by the media, which brings those stories back to the forefront every time a new disgrace happens to *la selección*. The national team's failure is something so habitual and so deeply rooted in Spain that one could say that secretly some fans get a morbid enjoyment out of such misfortunes. In a sense, the continued disappointment with *la selección* serves as a metaphor to explain their disappointment at the idea of Spain as a nation. Perhaps the fact that Spain can never triumph in the sport its people loves the most, serves as a sign, to some, that the idea of Spain as a nation has failed. That could also explain, in part, the fact that the idea of patriotism does not seem to

¹² We can find good chronicles of these legendary failures in Fernández Santander (1990) and Ball (2003a).

¹³ Again, a survey of newspapers after the latest loss by Spain to France in the 2006 World Cup yields the following headlines: "Back Home... As Always" (*Marca*, 28 Jun 2006); "The Never Ending Story" (*AS*, 28 Jun 2006); "Spain, As Always..." (*Sport*, 28 Jun 2006); "Again" (*El Mundo*, 28 Jun 2006); "Everyday Spain" (*El País*, 28 Jun 2006).

be as deeply ingrained in Spanish people as in other countries, and could be related to the issue of nationalism, which will be discussed below.

Whatever the reason for the repeated shipwrecks for *la selección*, there is always the feeling that the players themselves and the coaching staff never achieve the goals that they are supposed to, nor do they respond at the level that their high salaries demand. For all these reasons, I think that the Spanish national football team represents one of the negative features of the Spanish stereotype: like Sancho Panza, they tend to be underachievers.

3.3. The Spanish Don Juan

In this section I am going to discuss a third character that has been linked to the representation of the Spanish national personality: Don Juan Tenorio. According to the DRAE, he is defined as a “bullyish and daring charmer” (1899). Don Juan’s qualities not only have to do with his relationship with women, but also with a masculinity prototype, sometimes called *Spanish macho* or *Latin lover*. Thus, Don Juan is a womanizer, but also an accomplished fighter, who never backs away from a violent duel with another man. In fact, his achievements are measured by two gauges: the number of women he has seduced and the number of men he has killed.

The Don Juan phenomenon has usually been associated more with the world of the bullfighter, immortalized in literature classics such as Prosper Merimee’s *Carmen*, Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* or Vicente Blasco Ibáñez’s *Blood and Sand*. Sports figures have not been necessarily connected with this stereotype, but there have been a few famous instances, especially among football players. Toro (2004) offers a few gems.

Juan Gómez *Juanito*, was a star for Real Madrid and for Spain in the late seventies and early eighties. His reputation led the FC Barcelona president at the time, José Luis Núñez to say about him that he “was leaving pregnant ladies in every corner” (Toro 2004:148),¹⁴ and it is true that Juanito admitted having children out of wedlock. His likeness to Don Juan, however, stemmed not only from his reputation as a womanizer; he was also a bully. In fact, few players have been as fearless as Juanito, who dared to take on the famously raucous crowds at the Little Marakana stadium in Belgrade. In 1977, Spain and Yugoslavia played a crucial qualifier for the Argentina 1978 World Cup. It was a rough match, always on the edge of turning into violence, but Spain not only managed to survive, but actually won 1-0. Shortly before the end, Juanito was substituted and, as he walked towards the dressing rooms, he ostensibly stretched out his arm and pointed his thumb down, making the death sign towards the crowd. Almost immediately, a bottle came flying from the stands and hit Juanito in the head, leaving him unconscious on the running track. The injury was not severe, though, and it did not hurt his spirit either.

Some years later, when Juanito’s career was already in decline, he got tangled with Lothar Matthaus, star of the Bayern Munich and of the German national team, and stepped on the side of his head. The action cost him a two year ban by UEFA, which had already suspended him years earlier. Finally, he died in a car crash in 1992, not even forty years old.

Juanito is not the only example of a Don Juan in the world of Spanish sports. Current Real Madrid star David Beckham is probably better known for his image as an icon of masculinity and for the details of his love life, than he is for his footballing abilities. In addition, Jorge *Mágico* González, who played for modest Cadiz CF in the eighties, reportedly was never considered a prospect in a big team due to his disorderly personal life, despite his excellent skills. These

¹⁴ See also some of Juanito’s exploits in Carreño (2003).

sports figures appear to embody the figure of Don Juan and represent one more aspect of the stereotypical Spanish personality.

3.4. Conclusions

At the outset of this section, I wondered whether the way that a country sees its sports celebrities can be a reflection of how it sees itself. I believe that the answer is yes, and we have seen it in the form of the three most famous characters to come from Spanish literature. Their main features have become part of the collective imagination of what many believe to be the Spanish national personality. We have seen that those characteristics can easily be applied to a series of sports figures that are thought of in terms of *quijotes*, *sanchopanzas* or *donjuanes*. Applying such personality traits to famous Spanish athletes reinforces the idea that those features are part of the collective identity of the country and helps turn the simple admiration for the celebrities into public identification with them.

Thus, those applications of the perceived collective Spanish imagination to sports heroes helps us better understand the way that many Spaniards see themselves, their society and their culture.

4. Politics and Sports: Symbols, Ideas and Conflicts

In this section I will try to show how sports help us understand certain political topics and conflicts. I will center around two aspects of Spanish culture and their representations in sports: national symbols and nationalism. Actually, these two themes are closely related in Spanish politics. Many events in the history of Spain can be conceived as the result of a tension between a unionist nationalism, which has tried to create the idea of a common motherland for all Spaniards, armed with a whole barrage of symbols (anthem, crown, flag, etc.), and a variety of centrifuge nationalist movements, with an equally heavy load of symbols, which have tried to keep their separate identity in what they consider a multi-nation state.

The Spanish coat of arms itself recognizes the diversity of its peoples and regions. It is divided into five sections that represent the five historic kingdoms that, willingly or not, united to become Spain: Castile, Leon, Aragon, Navarre and Granada, along with other symbols that represent the now lost empire overseas. Spain is thus represented as a mosaic of peoples, cultures and languages, which throughout history have accepted to freely associate with the others in mutual solidarity, but at the same time have resisted the imposition of unity. Here it is worthwhile mentioning that that unity in Spanish history has more often been the result of foreign invasions (Romans, Visigoths, Arabs, French) than an internal force.

The debate between the two kinds of nationalism has returned to the forefront of Spanish politics, since the so-called historical nationalities, especially the Basque Country and Catalonia, have reopened the question of the structure of the Spanish state. Among their demands stand out the desire to achieve more self-determination, and the wish to be called *nations* rather than the more ambiguous term *nationality* used in the 1978 Spanish constitution.

The use of symbols on the part of one or another type of nationalism is especially evident in sports, a domain in which collective passion can be expressed with the most freedom. In the words of Hobsbawn (1990), “the imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people” (143), and Basque and Catalan nationalists know it, since one of their demands is the possibility to compete with their own national teams in international tournaments. In this section, I will study some Spanish political ideas and how the use of national symbols in sports reflects them.

4.1. The Spanish National Symbols

I have already introduced Luis Arconada, the goalkeeper for the Spanish national team that received that infamous goal by Michel Platini in Paris in 1984. Two years earlier, he had been the subject of an absurd controversy that reflects the attitude that some people hold towards the symbols of the Spanish nation.

In 1982, Spain organized the twelfth football World Cup. Traditionally, host countries had fared quite well, and therefore, a general climate of euphoria surrounded the Spanish national team. However, Spain once again failed to convert its chance to a win. Despite very favorable refereeing, Spain placed second in its group and fell into a quarterfinal group with two first-place qualifiers, the strong English and German teams, which rapidly eliminated *la selección* from the Cup.

Several of the goals scored against Spain were the consequence of soft-handed deflections by Arconada that always ended up at an opposing player's feet. Even though the blame for those goals should have also been shouldered by the Spanish defenders' lack of attention to the ball and their defective covering of the adversary forwards, most of the popular rage was directed towards Arconada, and, in some cases, not just because of his performance on the pitch.

The traditional Spanish team's uniform included black socks with the Spanish flag on the elastic band. Arconada asked the Spanish federation to allow him to use plain white socks instead, for mere superstition. Arconada, a winner of two league championships with his club, Real Sociedad from San Sebastián, believed that the white socks brought him good luck. The Federation conceded to his desire and Arconada wore his favorite socks, taking advantage of the fact that FIFA allowed goalkeepers to wear socks different in color from their teammates.

The main problem was that Arconada was a Basque, and some interpreted that he did not want to wear the Spanish flag on his socks not out of superstition, but because of his political convictions. To those people, Arconada was disrespecting the Spanish flag, and it took little to stretch that idea to accusing him of playing poorly for Spain either out of disinterest or even on purpose. It certainly has not been the first time that a Basque or Catalan player has been publicly accused of a lack of passion for the jersey of the Spanish team.

The truth seems to be another story. During the World Cup, TVE (Spanish public television) ran a survey of goalkeeper's socks and discovered that roughly half of them wore different colors from those of their teammates. Also, Arconada had been wearing white socks for Real Sociedad for years, while the club's uniform called for blue ones, a fact that appeared to confirm that the whole issue was just a matter of superstition, as Arconada had said in the first place. It must also be noted that, despite the mistake in Platini's free kick, Arconada's performance with the national team in 1984 was crucial in Spain's advancement to the final game of the 1984 European Championship. And he did it wearing his white socks. Finally, Ball (2003a) notes that Arconada has never made public displays of nationalism of any sort.

Nevertheless, the most radical defenders of Spanish nationalism chose him as the target of their rage at what possibly was the lowest performance in the Spanish national team's history. They turned what they perceived as disrespect towards one of their beloved symbols, the Spanish flag, into a deliberate failure. There is little doubt that Arconada in 1982 was not at his finest, but it is difficult to believe that he was part of a deliberate conspiracy to harm the Spanish nation. Yet, the importance given by certain people to those small events proves once again that sporting events carry a heavy symbolic load. The way that political symbols are used in sports is clearly susceptible to all kinds of political interpretations and the agents involved in sporting events can become unwitting targets for political attacks.

4.2. The symbols of Centrifuge Nationalism

Sports have been one of the scenarios where nationalist feelings have been sheltered from persecution and have even been expressed with a certain degree of freedom in times as tough as those lived under Franco.¹⁵ Sports have served nationalists as an escape valve for their frustrations and a hidden vehicle for their ideas. As is to be expected, the Basque Country and Catalonia provide us with the best instances of the connection between nationalist ideas and sports.

One clear example of Basque nationalism in sports is the *Euskadi* cycling team, which started as a popular movement to support young riders. Part of its budget still comes from contributions by fans, but recently it has also enlisted the support of commercial sponsors, mainly the Basque telephone company Euskaltel.

The Euskaltel-Euskadi has become a fixture and a curiosity in the Tour de France in the last few years. Every time the race approaches the Pyrenees anywhere near the Basque Country, a large number of supporters wearing the orange colors of Euskaltel gather on the side of the road. Some of these fans not only support the cyclists, but also use the global impact of the Tour's television coverage to expose all the symbols of Basque nationalism, including Basque flags and banners with political messages. It is also common to see graffiti in support of ETA on the asphalt for the aerial TV views.

The so-called *orange tide* has attracted crowds so big that sometimes they block the riders' way, prompting American seven-time winner Lance Armstrong to say "it's unbelievable that we went through that without being killed" (Thomazeau 2004). Such an exaggeration on the part of Armstrong has to be understood more as a consequence of the Basque people's violent reputation than as a result of real events on the road. In any case, it is always comical to hear misinformed foreign sportscasters describe the scene in the Pyrenees as a concentration of "Spanish fans", even though most of them openly show their Basque nationalist paraphernalia.

But perhaps the biggest symbol of nationalism in Spanish sports comes from Catalonia: Fútbol Club Barcelona, popularly known as *Barça*. *Barça* has been described as "the most revered symbol of Catalan nationalism (Burns 1999:xi), the "unarmed symbolic army of Catalonia" (Vázquez Montalbán 2005), or simply a sort of Catalan national team (Laporta 2005).

Catalanista and *Barcelonista* propaganda have exploited a nationalist discourse in which both Catalonia and *Barça* have been victims of a centralist conspiracy. The collective memory of *Barcelonismo* has made its own collection of episodes that symbolically represent this conflict. It started in 1925 with an act of disrespect to the Spanish national anthem at the old Les Corts stadium. Burns (1999) and Ball (2003a) tell us that the crowd, angry with then dictator and former Captain General of Catalonia Miguel Primo de Rivera for his attacks on Catalan nationalism, whistled¹⁶ and booed at the first notes of the anthem during halftime. Thus the alleged conspiracy against *Barça* started with a six-month suspension from participation in any competitive match.

By far the most theatrical of all representations of *Barça*'s struggles against Spanish nationalism takes form in the rivalry with Real Madrid, considered by many the prime representative of Spanish nationalism on the football pitch. The history of this rivalry, recently described by a Catalan politician as a match between Catalonia and Spain,¹⁷ is full of moments of glory, heroism and disgrace on both sides.

¹⁵ See Shaw (1987).

¹⁶ Unlike other countries, whistling in Spain is used mainly as a sign of disapproval.

¹⁷ Joan Puigcercós, representative in Congress for the radical nationalist party Esquerra Republicana, in an interview to the daily *Sport*, April 29, 2002.

The collective imagination of *Barcelonismo* remembers instances like the time in 1943 when a Francoist army official visited the Barça dressing room before a match between the two rivals. The Director of State Security reminded the Catalan players that they had been on the wrong side of the Civil War. The visit was so intimidating for the Barça players and left them in such a state of panic that Real Madrid won the match 11-1.

Other landmarks include the so-called *bottle match*, the final of the Generalísimo's Cup in 1968, which Barcelona won against Real Madrid in the latter's Bernabéu stadium. The Real supporters, angry with the referee, filled the pitch with bottles at the end of the game. Two years later it was Barça's Camp Nou field that filled with cushion seats when the infamous referee Emilio Guruceta called a penalty in favor of Real Madrid for a foul that clearly had happened outside the penalty box. As recently as 2002, FC Barcelona fans received Luis Figo, who had left them for Real, with a barrage of objects, including a roasted pig's head, which the next day appeared on the cover of every Madrid newspaper.

In the last few months before the writing of this article, FC Barcelona, as an institution, has taken part in the debate over the Catalan statute supporting the new demands by the nationalists. First, they displayed a banner before a game with the message "We want a new statute" in Catalan. Later, once the new project had been approved by the Catalan Parliament, the club joined a political action group in favor of the new set of laws. Once again, Barça has taken sides on the debate over nationalism.

4.3. Conclusions

Politics in sports and sports in politics seem to form an unavoidable vicious circle in Spanish society. We have seen that the use of national symbols in sporting events can lead to misunderstandings and bring to the surface confronting political ideas.

On the one hand, we have seen examples where certain uses of the national symbols of Spain bring up the ideas latent in mostly right-wing Spanish centralist nationalism. On the other hand, we have seen that centrifuge nationalism, especially in the Basque Country and Catalonia use sports as a vehicle to express their views, usually associated with a radical leftist separatism. This tension reflects the complexities of Spanish politics and the difficulties faced when trying to integrate such a diverse state. Once again, sports serve as a window into the Spanish people's minds, whether to show what unites them or what divides them.

5. Contrasts between Sports and Society: Women and Immigrants

In the last section of this article, we will see that the situation of certain groups of society in Spanish sports may not be a completely faithful reflection of their situation in the whole of society. What I will show is that in some instances sports lead society in general, whereas in others they trail behind, but the distance is never so big that we can dismiss the parallelism between the two. I will specifically look at the situation of two groups that have become icons of the new Spanish society: women and immigrants.

5.1. Women in Spanish Sports

There is a significant reason why I have not mentioned women until now in this article. Female sports in Spain usually trails men's sports by one or two decades in regard to level of professionalism, international success, impact on the media, and representation in sports journalism as well.

Let us start by discussing the last of these aspects. Sports journalism, until very recently, was considered a male profession in Spain. It was not until the late seventies or early eighties that female faces were seen and women's voices were heard in broadcasts and reports dealing

with sports. Initially, women were typecast in small roles: sideline reporters and interviewers or talking heads in newscasts. Even today, women's roles tend to be associated with the display of a pretty face and are precluded from off-the-camera situations. Nevertheless, even the limited roles in which we find women sports journalists are an improvement over the situation some thirty years ago.

There have been a few pioneers in female sports journalism. Mari Carmen Izquierdo is the one that has gone the farthest in the profession. She started in the early eighties as a reporter and the host of the Sunday night football highlight show *Estudio Estadio* on TVE. Her face has gone into obscurity, but her work off the camera led her to become president of the Spanish Sports Journalist Association, Director of Sports Production at TVE, and member of the Spanish Olympic Committee. Other names like Esperanza Solano or Maria Antonia Alvarez started at the same time, opening the door for other women such as Olga Viza or María Escario to follow in their steps.

Yet, despite the advances, we will still have to wait for a woman's voice to be heard leading the live broadcast of a football game or motorsports event on Spanish television or radio. One only needs to listen to the Sunday afternoon radio carousels that travel from soccer game to soccer game to realize the absence of female voices. The same goes for local radio broadcasts. Another area that has been closed to female presence is that of sports analysis, especially the top-rated late night sports talk shows on radio.

A similar situation is found in regard to athletes. If in previous sections I talked about the *quijotes* that appeared mainly during the fifties and sixties in Spanish sports, the pioneers in female sports did not appear with such force until the eighties, and even today we find instances of women making strides in sports where no Spanish woman had ever triumphed before. One of the differences, however, is that, with few exceptions, women sports are still expecting the arrival of the second generation, the one that can participate in international success without the struggles of their predecessors. The level of professionalism in female sports in Spain is also lagging far behind men, and the progress made until now seems more conspicuous in terms of competitive than economic results.

The list of Spanish female pioneers starts with track and field athlete Carmen Valero, who followed Mariano Haro's path and bested him, winning the Cross Country World Championship in 1976 and 1977. She also pioneered at being the first Spanish woman ever to qualify for the track and field events at the Olympics in Montreal 1976. Her work made way for other good mid- and long distance runners, such as Maite Zúñiga or Marta Domínguez, and also walkers, like María Vasco. Nonetheless, female track and field athletes in Spain are still well behind their male colleagues.

If there is a sport in Spain where women consistently outperform men, it is skiing, and it owes Blanca Fernández Ochoa a great deal. Sister to Francisco, who shocked the world with his gold medal at the Sapporo 1972 Winter Olympics, Blanca had a much more consistent career than her brother, and in Albertville 1992 became the first ever Spanish female Olympic medallist. In addition, she won several World Ski Cup events and led a path followed by others, such as Carolina Ruiz and María José Rienda. As far as male skiers go, nobody has matched Ochoa's achievements yet.

Other names could be added, such as tennis players Arantxa Sánchez Vicario and Conchita Martínez, or cyclist Joane Somarriba. As a whole, women's status in sports recalls the situation of women in Spanish society. Inequalities persist in access to promotions and managerial positions at work, as well as in salaries for the same position. However, women have made great strides since the advent of democracy to Spain, entering the job market and gaining access to higher

education in record numbers. In recent years, the general population has also become more sensitive to the issue of domestic violence, a residue of traditional *machismo* that was swept under the rug for decades in Spain and has finally become a top concern in public polls and for the government.

Nonetheless, one gets the impression that women's situation in sports is still a step behind the general achievements by Spanish women. The rate of success in female sporting events has been slow and has generated little media attention, with the exception of tennis and a few other sports. Another factor may be that many Spanish female champions compete in low audience sports, such as taekwondo, judo or sailing. The signs of progress are there, especially looking at the medal tallies in recent Olympic Games, but Spanish women in sports continue to trail men in both the competitive and the economic sense.

5.2. Sports and Immigration

One of the most controversial topics in current Spain is immigration. Politicians and citizens argue about the role of immigrants in Spanish society, but it is clear that immigrants will continue to be a major factor in the future.

If, when discussing women's situation in Spanish sports, we see that it is a few steps behind that of women in society in general, the case of immigrants is the exact opposite. Foreign elite athletes find all kinds of support in Spain when trying to achieve legal status and citizenship, unlike the bulk of immigrants who go to Spain to work in other professions. There have even been a few cases that have uncovered an exaggerated interest in allowing in any foreign athlete who could improve the competitive results for Spanish sports.

Spanish society is at a crossroads with regard to immigration. On the one hand, immigrants constitute a necessary source of labor and contribute greatly to a social system on the verge of collapse. The aging of the Spanish population has been the combined result of a high life-expectancy and a very low birth rate, to the point that immigrant labor has become the only solution to the problem. In fact, recent estimates calculate that the arrival of new immigrants has already guaranteed the current social security system for a further twelve years (De Barrón 2006). On the other hand, immigration has created problems of various kinds: border control, an increase in bureaucratic processes and the appearance of foci of social conflict and isolation.

Different political parties have expressed differing opinions and proposals whether to take a hard line or a more tolerant stance on illegal immigration. Recently, the socialist government opened a grace period during which all illegal immigrants who could show proof of a valid work contract would be granted legal status. Before that, the Popular Party government had already loosened the citizenship requirements to allow the descendants of emigrants to return to Spain and become Spanish citizens.

Nonetheless, illegal immigration has caused problems in the border areas with Africa: the Gibraltar Strait, the Easternmost Canary Islands and the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla in Northern Africa. Boats loaded with immigrants, popularly known as *pateras* and *cayucos*, cross the dangerous waters of the Strait or the Atlantic hoping to reach the Spanish coastline. Others try to climb the barbwire fences that separate Ceuta and Melilla from Morocco, but injure themselves or even die trying. Many who reach their goal either are found by the police, or arrive in such state of exhaustion that they have to turn themselves in to get medical help. In either case, the result is the deportation back home and the loss of valuable savings used to pay the mobs that run the circulation of immigrants from Africa.

Sports figures arrive in Spain under very different circumstances. Elite athletes who can improve Spain's performance in their sports receive all kinds of help in order to avoid bureaucratic

obstacles. Even though in general, the Spanish public welcomes these figures, sometimes there remain doubts about their commitment to their new country.

In the early seventies, the word *oriundo* entered the Spanish football lexicon. The word came from Italian, where it was used to define those players who, despite having been born abroad from Italian ancestors, returned to the motherland to defend its colors. In the 30s, both the Italian clubs and the national team benefited from them, winning two World Cups in 1934 and 1938.¹⁸

As far as Spanish football goes, the *oriundos* benefited clubs far more than the national team. Clubs used them to improve their rosters at a time when foreign players were not allowed to play in Spain. However, an inquiry instigated by FC Barcelona and the Basque clubs uncovered all kinds of irregularities in the process of naturalization. Many players, especially Argentines, falsified their birth certificates, falsifying the birthplaces of their parents and placing them in Spain. Burns (1999) tells the tale of a player whose birth certificate said that his father had been born in “Celta de Vigo”, which is the name of the football club from that Galician city.

More recently, other sports have profited from nationalized athletes: The list of acquisitions includes Brazilians and Argentines in football, North Americans in basketball, Russians in handball and swimming, or Cubans in track and field.

A particularly comical case was that of Cross Country skier Johann *Juanito* Muehlegg, who started shopping around for a country when he ran into difficulties with the German Federation. Due to his status as a world-class athlete in a sport poorly represented in Spain, he was granted the citizenship “by naturalization, that is, by political decree, approved by the Ministry Cabinet” (Echevarría 2002). However, Muehlegg never got himself under the Spanish Federation’s discipline and kept his own team of doctors and trainers.

During the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City in 2002, Johann insisted that everybody call him *Juanito*, and pictures of him waving the Spanish flag filled the Spanish press. Under the proud gaze of the Spanish media and the government, Muehlegg won three gold medals, incidentally the only ones for Spain at the event. The lone dissenting voice was that of former gold medalist Francisco Fernández Ochoa, who raised concerns that *Juanito*’s medals had not really been won by Spain, and that the federation was using Muehlegg’s success to hide the real lack of support and promotion for young Spanish skiers. More than one journalist accused Ochoa of jealousy at the time.

Yet, all of a sudden, all hell broke loose when the news came that Muehlegg, now turned into *Johann* again, had tested positive in a drug test and had his medals taken away. The Spanish media and the whole country reacted with a mixture of surprise and embarrassment. The athlete who, just a few days earlier, was a national hero for having voluntarily given up his original citizenship to win medals for Spain now was portrayed as a cheat who had used the federation and the media to advance his own fabrication. At the same time, the highest instances of sports management in Spain had been embarrassed by their hasty decision to welcome elite athletes at any cost. Fernández Ochoa, on the other hand, had been vindicated in his efforts to expose the inappropriateness of the immigration policy.

The case of sports immigrants is clearly not representative of the rest of society. World-class athletes find a much more open road to citizenship than the majority of the other immigrants. The public perception of these nationalized athletes is twofold. On the one hand, Spaniards feel proud that foreigners choose to go to Spain to pursue their dreams. On the other, there is the suspicion that they choose Spain because that allows them easier access to the national team than

¹⁸ See the discussion in Lanfranchi and Taylor (2001).

they would face in their countries of origin. In any case, the feelings towards them usually go hand in hand with their competitive results. If the immigrant athletes help bring more success to Spanish sports, their chances of being accepted in their adoptive country as one of their own are that much greater.¹⁹

We need to see if the rest of Spanish society accepts in the same vein those immigrants who arrive in the country to work in far less flamboyant professions, such as domestic workers, agricultural field workers and waiters. So far there has been tension and distrust, but the truth is that immigrants are destined to play a big role in the future if Spain still hopes to keep a labor force solid enough to maintain the social system in a country aged by decades of low birth rates.

6. Conclusions

At the beginning of this article I set the goal of answering a series of questions that had to do with the relation between sports and Spanish society. The initial hypothesis was that sports, like many other aspects of a society, can be a mirror in which to gaze at a country, its people and its culture, and that sports can offer a vertical view of a slice of the society as a whole.

As far as Spain goes, I have shown that the ratings of both newspapers and television audiences show that Spain is a country where sports are given a very important role in everyday life. I have discussed how certain stereotypes with deep roots in Spanish popular culture, such as being *quijotes*, *sanchopanzas* or *donjuanes*, find perfect representations in Spanish sports. We have seen that sport uses politics as much as politics uses sport and that sporting events carry a heavy symbolic load, especially when representing nationalistic feelings and the different sensibilities associated with them. Finally, I have shown that the status in sports of some social groups show significant differences with their status in society as a whole: whereas women in Spanish sports seem not to have advanced as much as they have in other aspects of society, world-class immigrant athletes find a much easier time getting to legal status and eventually Spanish citizenship than immigrants who work in other professions.

I believe that this article gives a vertical view of Spanish society, culture and civilization, albeit focused on a very specific domain. I find it valuable, nevertheless, for several reasons. First, it serves as a specific application of common ideas that already existed about Spain and that come from more general, horizontal views of its society. Second, it offers new ideas and examples that can be used to better illustrate those horizontal views. And third, it shows that elements of popular culture, such as sports, can be used to shed light on Spanish society and help students of Spanish, especially those with a previous interest in those cultural domains, better understand the culture and civilization of Spain.

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¹⁹ An international trend, according to Ros (2006).

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