‘Football and Fascism: Local Identities and National Integration in Mussolini’s Italy’

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ABSTRACT

Football was institutionalised as a Fascist game in 1926 after which, it was exploited domestically as a political soporific to develop a sense of Italian identity and internationally as a diplomatic tool to improve the standing of the regime in the global arena. By studying the experiences of club teams in Florence and Bologna, plus the success of the national team, this thesis draws conclusions as to the coexistence of apparently contradictory local, national and Fascist identities. Furthermore it contributes to the debate regarding the regime’s attempt to manufacture consent.

The formation of the first national league in 1929, contributed to the emergence of a number of clubs which dominated European competition. Internationally, the Italian team won the 1934 World Cup, held in Italy; the 1936 Olympic soccer tournament; and retained the World Cup trophy in France in 1938. Yet, despite the arguably successful attempt to construct an imagined community via the politicisation of this aspect of popular mass culture, on occasion, the regime met serious resistance, thereby exposing some of the real conflicts and contradictions that existed within the Fascist society and state.

Following extensive archival research in Florence and Bologna, this thesis also compares the histories of the respective city teams and the differing ways in which they contributed to the formation of local and national identities. Significant in the formation of these identities were the revolutionary stadia built by the regime for both clubs, which are examined as part of a detailed consideration of the politicisation of sports architecture under Fascism.

While contributing to the cultural history of Fascist Italy, this thesis draws overall conclusions that suggest the regime’s attempt to use football to form identity and manufacture consensus, actually forced it to recognise existing tensions within society, thereby permitting the existence of diversity and individuality.
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Acknowledgements

A recent trawl through family photo albums during an afternoon that would have been better spent preparing this thesis for submission, revealed the consistent feature of a football. From a back garden in Essex to the curve of Rome's Stadio Olimpico, football has guided, if not governed, my mazy dribble through life.

Replacing West Ham's Billy Bonds might have been my dream occupation, with the emphasis on dream, but developing an academic career around the study of the 'beautiful game' was a pleasant alternative. The potential for serious historical study into football was revealed to me by Duncan Shaw's research on Spanish football under Franco, at Queen Mary and Westfield College, London. While sport has increasingly come into vogue as a serious topic of academic research and discussion, it was this thesis that first exposed me to the game's potential as a revealing and relatively novel area of historical analysis.

The skills and experience that I have acquired as a journeyman Sunday morning footballer across the playing fields of Essex and east London, prepared me well for the demands of historical research. A modicum of ability and grim determination, supplemented by the inspiration of others, can go a long way.

Without underestimating their years of dedication, footballers such as Diego Maradona, Johann Cruyff and Bobby Moore, to name but a few, were blessed with heaven-sent talents. Of course, world class historians have also been inspirational, but by nature of the trade their talents are somewhat less divine and spontaneous, although occasionally no less creative and motivational. Eric Hobsbawm would be the first name on my 'Inspirational XI' team sheet and he would wear the number 10. I also owe much to the efforts and dedication of others who have helped me to reach this point.

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No successful research project is possible without adequate funding, which I have been fortunate to receive throughout my university career. As an undergraduate, I was extremely lucky to benefit from the final three years of the grant system, without which I know I would never have got started. I hope this thesis goes someway to repaying the Local Education Authority's investment, proves value for money, and demonstrates what is possible with enough support. A one-year British Academy studentship took me to the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, London, where staff developed my academic skills and broadened my knowledge of interwar Europe.

The Arts and Humanities Research Board picked up the baton and generously funded me for three years, plus one five month summer bursary, to undertake this Ph.D research. This was also supplemented by individual grants from the Royal Historical Society and the UCL Graduate School. Requiring over two-years of research in Italy, I also received huge support from the Italian Cultural Institute, London. Free language tuition in Italy helped develop the linguistic skills necessary to tackle the Italian archives, while two summer bursaries enabled me to concentrate solely on the demands of the work. I hope this generous sponsorship of British students interested in contributing to the knowledge of Italy continues and thank the Director, Mario Fortunato and Sig.a. Silvana Prosdocimo, in London, and Gianfranco Renda in Rome. Concluding the research and writing up the thesis was enormously helped by a Scouloudi Fellowship at the Institute of Historical Research, London. In return, I hope this thesis makes a small contribution to enhancing its reputation.

Exploring the sources of a number of Italian archives and libraries demanded the attention and patience of staff throughout Italy, to interpret my tongue-tied demands. For this, I thank the following institutions; Archivio Centrale Dello Stato, Rome; Archivio del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Rome; Biblioteca di Storia Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome; Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Milan; Biblioteca Universitaria, Bologna; Biblioteca Archiginnasio, Bologna; Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Florence; Archivio Storico del Comune di Firenze, Florence. Of particular help were William Baietti and the staff at the Archivio Storico del Comune di Bologna; Gianfranco La Peruta, FIGC Biblioteca Settore Tecnico Coverciano, Florence, for his bibliographical help and football talk; Dr F. Fini, Direttore FIGC Fondazione Museo del Calcio, Firenze, for generously putting the impressive contents of the museum at my disposal. Long may it continue to grow.

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Academic research is often a very lonely business, although studying Italian football has opened many doors to friendships and acquaintances that have entertained me and taught me much about contemporary life in the peninsula. I would certainly have been unable to conclude it without the friends and colleagues who helped and supported me, and made me laugh in their own ways. Among those back home who advised me, took the trouble to stay in touch and sometimes visited were Torbun Attrup, Bob Blenkinsop, Tony Callaghan, Paul Dossett, Simon Kuper, Chris Martin, Rob Mellett, Kate Quinn, Paul Riley, Mike Rivers, Wendy Sumpton and Laurence Weeks. Ron Nicholls also put his time and technical skills freely at my disposal when Microsoft got the better of me.

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## Abbreviations

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<td>AdMdAE</td>
<td>Archivio del Ministero degli Affari Esteri</td>
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<td>AIA</td>
<td>Associazione Italiana Arbitri</td>
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<td>AOI</td>
<td>Africa Orientale Italiana</td>
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<td>APEF</td>
<td>Associazione proletaria per l’educazione fisica</td>
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<td>ASCB</td>
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<td>BA</td>
<td>Belle Arti</td>
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<td>BFC</td>
<td>Bologna Football Club</td>
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<td>CA</td>
<td>Carteggio Amministrativo</td>
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<td>Il Carlino</td>
<td>Il Resto del Carlino</td>
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<td>CCI</td>
<td>Confederazione Calcistica Italiana</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIS</td>
<td>Commissione Impianti Sportivi</td>
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<td>CITA</td>
<td>Comitato Italiano Tecnico Arbitrale</td>
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<td>Carteggio Ordinario</td>
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<td>Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESPF</td>
<td>Enti Sportivi Provinciali Fascisti</td>
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<td>FASCI</td>
<td>Federazione delle Associazioni Sportive Cattoliche</td>
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<tr>
<td>FFGGCC</td>
<td>Fasci Giovanili di Combattimento</td>
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<td>FIDAL</td>
<td>Federazione Italiana di Atletica Leggera</td>
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<td>FIF</td>
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<td>OND</td>
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<td>Partito Nazionale Fascista</td>
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<td>PSI</td>
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<td>RG</td>
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<td>ULIC</td>
<td>Unione Libera Italiana del Calcio</td>
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1. Introduction

Whether outside or within the borders, sporting or not, we Italians... shook, and still shake with joy when seeing in these pure thoroughbreds, that overwhelm so many noble opponents, such a symbol of the overwhelming march of Mussolini’s Italians. Now the “Tour” [de France] awaits us: the footballers shirts are in the cyclists’ bags, as moral support and certain lucky charms. But the strongest sign of the third, desired, hoped for, predicted victory is in the unshakeable will with which, outside the country, Italy’s athletes struggle and win in the name of Mussolini.¹

The 1938 World Cup victory in France was the zenith of sporting achievement for Fascist Italy. According to Lando Ferretti, Mussolini’s press officer and one of Fascism’s most prominent theorists of sport, such successes were uniting the Italian diaspora behind the regime, while symbolising the rise of the Fascist Italian nation.

Up until this point, ‘Italy’ was a more accurate term for the geographical area united by the Risorgimento (Unification) than the ‘Italian nation’, which remained a disparate, disconnected entity, in need of physical and psychological integration. In post unification Italy, governments lacked a critical sense of legitimacy among Italian citizens that were alienated by geographic, economic and linguistic barriers. Above all, legitimacy was severely impeded by the restrictive franchise and the failure of electoral turnout to register any more than 60 per cent between 1861 and 1886. The governments elected, therefore, ‘represented’ only a tiny minority of the population. There was a desperate need for something capable of tying the new nation into a communal identity.

Geographically and psychologically Italian society was estranged from itself as much as from the state, while analyses of the physical condition of the ‘united’ nation failed to improve the picture. Not surprisingly, for the malnourished masses that were employed in backbreaking labour for gruelling hours and who lived in desperately unsanitary conditions with high rates of infant mortality, the pursuit of sport and physical recreation for health or leisure purposes was a low priority. Among the working and peasant classes there was simply not the time, money or will to consider the pursuit of any sporting activity, as the majority concentrated their energies on merely staying alive. Only the financially comfortable aristocratic, bourgeois and often anglophile members of society were in any position to take an interest in sport, be that as active participants or passive supporters and enthusiasts.

¹ L. Ferretti, Uno, due... (e tre?)’, Lo Sport Fascista, 7, 1938, p.14.
There was a huge gap in the market and a lack of provision that became increasingly more evident as the fruits of modernity - material goods, leisure time and to a certain degree disposable income - began to spread throughout mass Italian society. This gap between demand and provision expanded rapidly due to the failure of the various liberal governments, the Catholic Church, and the Socialist/Labour movement to respect sport and physical recreation and, most importantly, appreciate their potential for achieving the type of mass socialisation of society that was so desperately needed.

Although Fascism preferred more classical, scholarly sports, such as fencing, as well as the fast, modern sport of motor racing, unlike its liberal, Catholic and Socialist predecessors the regime was quick to appreciate the mass appeal of football (calcio), even if it questioned the game’s merits as a sporting activity. The regime institutionalised calcio as a Fascist game in 1926 after which it was exploited domestically as a political soporific to develop a sense of Italian identity, and internationally as a diplomatic tool to improve the standing of the regime in the global arena. Under the Fascist regime, which came to power on 28 October 1922, sport in general and football in particular were awarded a level of importance previously unseen in united Italy. Financial and organisational investment quickly produced dramatically improved international results at the Olympic Games. Moreover, Fascism’s intervention in calcio not only purged it of the threat of implosion, but also resulted in a more disciplined structure that was capable of producing well-honed, technically outstanding footballers that could raise the Italian national game to the highest international level.

This thesis analyses the regime’s reasons for its intervention in calcio in 1926, the changes it implemented and their effect upon the experiences of the cities of Florence and Bologna and their respective club teams and stadia, as well as the fortunes of the national team in this period. In doing so, it draws conclusions as to the coexistence of apparently contradictory local, national and Fascist identities. Furthermore, it also contributes to the debate regarding the regime’s attempt to manufacture consent through the political direction and exploitation of the leisure time of the masses, with an original consideration of a mass popular activity that has so far not received the type of attention that has been reserved for other cultural activities.

The formation of the first national league in 1929 contributed to the emergence of a number of teams that went on to dominate European competition in the following decade. Internationally, the Italian team won the 1934 World Cup, held in Italy, the 1936 Olympic...
soccer tournament in Berlin, and retained the World Cup trophy in France in 1938. Yet, despite the arguably successful attempt to construct an imagined community via the politicisation of this aspect of mass popular culture, on occasion, the regime’s projected Italian identity met serious resistance that exposed some of the real and unavoidable conflicts and contradictions that existed within the Fascist society and state.

While contributing to the cultural history of Fascist Italy, this thesis draws overall conclusions that suggest the regime’s attempt to use sport to form identity, actually forced it to recognise existing tensions within society, thereby permitting the existence of the type of diversity and individuality that is not naturally associated with Fascism. Consequently, while the regime promoted its ideal of an organic, patriotic, nationalist and united nation, through football, the reality was often very different. Although calcio was an effective vehicle for promoting and disseminating the regime’s view of Fascist society, occasionally it also drew considerable attention to the strong regional identities that existed throughout the peninsula.

Besides the benefits derived from the centralisation of calcio, one of the regime’s principal objectives for the takeover was to make it more adept at producing the quality of international footballers and teams that would be capable of representing the new political order and society. By 1934, as Carlo Levi argued under the pseudonym of Ettore Bianchi in the socialist and anti-fascist publication Giustizia e Libertà, the regime’s direction of football and sport in general had resulted in it becoming:

a great industry, where all the results are accurately recorded, catalogued, utilised and exploited. The press and schools serve propaganda: they feed the young a vain pride in some sporting successes...and together they excite that passion...that holds no danger. Sport co-operates in the most efficient mode to hold the country in blissful infancy.\(^\text{2}\)

Yet, rather than make national pride reliant upon the endeavours of an individual athlete, as was often the case with Olympic events, the success of football teams at all levels reasserted the individual’s important role in securing the success of the organic whole, under the tutelage of a single leader figure. As Il Calcio Illustrato pointed out at the time: ‘being a collective sport accentuates the purely social value of football. Football exists, fundamentally, from collaboration. Individuality is allowed and demanded, as leaders and the best players are needed in societies, but neither are less talented players any less important.\(^\text{3}\) Furthermore, as clarified by the 1927 Carta del Lavoro: “The Italian nation is an organism


\(^{3}\) ‘Saluto alla palla e al tifoso’, Calcio Illustrato, 1, 1, 2/12/31, p.2.
having ends, a life, a means superior in power and duration to the single individuals or
groups of individuals composing it....it is a moral, political, and economic unit which finds
its integral realization in the fascist state".4 Jeffrey Schnapp used this statement as a basis for
his discussion of the regime's failed attempt to carve a central niche for theatre within the
cultural life of the masses. However, this study considers Fascism’s earlier and more
successful exploitation of calcio, which enabled it to truly reach out to the masses in a
manner and on a scale that was unachievable through any other cultural medium.

While this thesis makes an obvious and natural contribution to sports history, it is
primarily a cultural history of life under the regime through the prism of football. It draws
conclusions about the game’s impact upon the issue of identity and the attempt to
manufacture consent in Fascist Italy through the exploitation of mass culture. This reflects
and contributes further to the existing historiographical debates by considering the following
broad themes throughout the thesis: identity, consensus, national and racial regeneration, plus
culture and modernity.

When speaking of identity I refer to the possibility of three coexisting yet differing
types, namely Fascist, national and local identities. As one of the key themes explored, calcio
shows how the Italian Fascist identity, as constructed and disseminated by the regime, both
reflected and contradicted the national and local identities that were further intensified by
Fascism’s takeover and politicisation of the game. Besides merely considering how these
differing identities were expressed through calcio, establishing their peaceable coexistence
reveals much about the regime’s attitude to identity itself. Essentially, while it promoted an
idealised Italian Fascist identity in an attempt to form an albeit imagined community, there
was, nonetheless, considerable room for differing local and national expressions that were
often far removed from the party vision, but were still acceptable to the regime. The breadth
of these acceptable forms of identity reflected the various sources of the regime’s inspiration,
which partly explains why such apparently contradictory ideas were often allowed to coexist.

Consequently, as will be demonstrated, the thematic issues identified above remain
interconnected throughout the thesis and cannot be treated as isolated areas of investigation,
due to the particular nature of football and its mass, cross-societal appeal. While this is the
first specific investigation into the nature and importance of Italian football under the regime,
other studies of Fascist mass culture have highlighted the way that consensus, modernity,

4 J. Schnapp, Staging Fascism. 18 BL and the Theater of Masses for Masses, Stanford, Stanford University
national regeneration and identity are all intertwined. One such example is Ruth Ben-Ghiatt’s study of culture and modernity, which, by discussing Mussolini’s intention to ‘make Italians’ and ‘remould behaviours and bodies’, has already shown how each of these four factors were instrumental in this process. If the regime was to physically, mentally and spiritually change Italian society, then the Fascist makeover had to go deeper than merely papering over the cracks of the liberal facade of nation.

Establishing an Italian Fascist identity among citizens was both a physical and psychological process of renewal and regeneration, which the regime attempted to achieve through a positive programme of physical education and a more negative eugenics policy that would identify and isolate what were considered to be social ills. Despite containing unquestionably racial implications this was more social horticulture, which was not uncommon in western Europe at the time, than the type of radical reengineering of the bloodline that has come to be associated with Nazi Germany. Yet, if it was possible to physically regenerate bodies this way, minds also needed specific attention for which reason, as Tracy Koon’s work bears out, Fascist education policy also had a crucial role to play in directing the future generations.

However, had the regime concentrated solely on the future it would have left those already mature Italians untouched, which accounts for its complementary intervention to instruct, guide and direct the adult population. By studying Fascism’s exploitation and manipulation of workers’ leisure-time activities, Victoria de Grazia has shown how the regime, which was so flagrantly anti-working class, attempted to socialise the masses and thereby establish a degree of legitimacy and consent for its rule. While the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro (OND) – After Work – Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB) - Fascist Youth Corps - local organised recreational circles and social clubs were an important avenue into the everyday lives of the masses for the regime, they nonetheless remained relatively unpoliticised and never attracted the interest or involvement of more affluent members of

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society. De Grazia's work is complemented by that of Koon, who has similarly concluded that, despite its best efforts, the regime was never able to rid itself of the 'basic contradiction between rhetoric and reality'.

Besides her analysis of the regime's exploitation of the leisure-time of the masses, De Grazia's work in particular encourages further investigation of many of the issues she raises, in broader cultural contexts. One example of this is Stefano Cavazza's research into the regime's rediscovery and restoration of popular folk-type festivals and activities. Further contributing to the regime's attempt to establish consensus through the development of myths and rituals that created some sense of common community, Cavazza also argues that the resumption of these old, folk-type activities was: 'an effect of the acceleration of the processes of modernization and of the technological transformation in the world of work.'

Above all, his study draws attention to how the regime's deliberate restoration of popular folk activities was designed to invent a tradition of shared identity. However, this constructed sense of community and belonging was essentially artificial, which casts a logical and unavoidable doubt upon the allegedly "popular" nature of the activities, as promoted by the regime.

In many respects the artificiality, or otherwise, of these traditions, festivals, myths and rituals is less important than how the regime actually attempted to use them as a form of social glue. In this way, Cavazza's work is a development of Emilio Gentile's theory about the regime's use of festivals, rituals, myths and cults that were centred on the sacralization of the state, to present Fascism as a lay political religion. Nationalists such as Enrico Corradini believed that war and conflict were alternative methods of establishing a sense of national community, thereby compensating for the incomplete national revolution that was the Risorgimento. Reflecting both this and the futurist belief in the restorative powers of war and death, combat and struggle became both real and metaphorical features of life in Fascist society. Further developing these ideas, Gentile identified how the masses, motivated by irrational and mythical thoughts, were encouraged to join this imagined group by communing in acts of collective public worship. It is an argument that appears to owe much to Gustave

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9 Koon, Believe, obey, fight, p.xxi.
11 Ibid., p.7.
Le Bon’s nineteenth century theory of crowds, in which he suggested the mind of the mass collective crowd could be manipulated and politically directed by the astute leader figure.\(^{13}\)

Building upon both Le Bon’s and Gentile’s ideas regarding the attempted manipulation of mass groups, this study argues that the regime also tried to mobilise Italian society through an occasionally subtle and sometimes very unsubtle use of the aesthetic in building works, design and art. While the various local parties went about restructuring their urban city life, a national construction programme resulted in the rise of a huge number of new and imposing buildings that symbolised Fascism. Containing aesthetic features that were often controversial and provoked a debate at the time about the nature of Fascist art, which remained definitively unresolved, these numerous public works projects were also integral to the battle against unemployment, which further contributed to the development of a sense of community action.

Most importantly, these projects symbolised the regime’s physical regeneration of Italy that, as Gentile has argued, was intended to further sacralize the regime and develop consensus among the masses. New regulatory town plans were drawn up for cities across the peninsula that contained new buildings intended to signify the strength and identity of the regime by imposing an unmistakable change in style from the structures of the liberal era. Somewhat ironically, the construction projects that were integral to the various city expansions also contributed to the regime’s attempt to de-urbanise society by moving the masses from the overcrowded and disease-ridden centres into the periphery. This regenerationist theme was further underlined by land reclamation projects, such as the construction of the new town of Sabaudia from marshland south of Rome and the Foro Mussolini project on the flood plain of the Tiber.

The latter was also an example of how the regime manipulated its broad interpretation of culture and modernity to formulate something that appeared intrinsically Fascist, thereby contributing to the formation of a national culture that many deemed to have been so lacking since unification. Intended to stimulate and contribute to the development of physical education and sporting excellence, the centre’s neo-Roman style mediated the regime’s historic imperial influences with its modernistic leanings. It formed a third way that was also apparent in a variety of other cultural formats, such as the attempt to establish a theatre of masses for the masses. As Jeffrey Schnapp has argued, this was designed to break down the

old, exclusive, liberal bourgeois medium, in favour of one that was more inclusive and better represented the ideals of the new regime.\textsuperscript{14}

Theatre was also a medium that Fascism believed could further contribute to the development of a sense of national community through the propagation of myths and rituals in productions. To enable this attempted metamorphosis of an essentially bourgeois institution into one for the masses, Fascist culture as a whole remained undefined and thus more inclusive than exclusive. Not only did this negate the need to make difficult theoretical choices about the nature of Fascist theatre, art and architecture, for example, it also avoided the consequent exclusion of cultural practitioners and theorists who may not have necessarily been in accordance with the regime, but still had something of value to offer. As Marla Stone has illustrated in her study of politics and culture:

the official culture of Italian Fascism is best defined by its diversities, contradictions and ambiguities...For the greater part of the Fascist era, the regime sought the cooperation and consent of artists, and the association between art and the state was one of mutual recognition and legitimation. The Mussolini dictatorship allowed artists to work and be supported without direct censorship (so long as they were not explicitly anti-Fascist). A large cross section of Italian artists and architects reciprocated by accepting the Fascist regime's patronage.\textsuperscript{15}

Much can be said about the regime’s various attempts to establish consensus through the construction of a national community, albeit one that was imaginary and did not necessarily reflect reality. However, while the various issues that have already been mentioned contributed hugely to the establishment and development of a number of debates within the historiography, no such study has thus far been broad enough to encompass the four key themes of identity, consensus, national/racial regeneration, plus culture and modernity. As a mass popular activity and spectator sport that crossed social and class barriers, arguably like no other, calcio provides the perfect opportunity to consider how the regime attempted to use culture to construct and establish a sense of national community among mass society, from which it hoped to gain some legitimacy and consensus.

To establish how the regime undertook this challenge and its success, or otherwise, this thesis is separated into the following thematic chapters that reflect, in their own particular way, the principal issues of identity, consensus, national regeneration and culture. Chapter 1 considers Liberal Italy’s sporting bequeathal to the regime and how Fascism responded to its minimal inheritance. Only bourgeois elitist circles and societies had

\textsuperscript{14} Schnapp, Staging Fascism, p.8.
provided any sort of structured sport prior to Fascism, which left an obvious opportunity for both the Catholic Church and the labour movement to mobilise the support of the masses through this medium. However, theoretical barriers and divisions within each presented Fascism with an "open goal" that Mussolini converted with aplomb. Once securely in power, the regime attuned its cultural influences towards creating a new sense of national community through sport and leisure time recreation.

Chapter 2 both establishes and assesses the reasons and justification for the regime’s specific and radical intervention into calcio. As a growing mass participatory and spectator sport, the game possessed a cross-national appeal that demanded Fascism brought it under control so as to demonstrate its authority, end the chaotic events that were punctuating almost every season and to portray its vision of the new Fascist society. Given its mass popular support and the opportunity it provided to reach out to the masses, calcio really was an offer that Fascism could not refuse. Having reformed and revitalised the structures, organisation and management of the game along Fascist lines, the regime set about providing facilities worthy of the new order and the Italian national game. As Chapter 3 suggests, the national stadium-building programme that was launched with Bologna’s Littoriale arena in 1926, possessed a significance beyond simply providing impressive stadia for club teams. First and foremost, massive stadia were symbolic of the regime’s national regeneration of both bodies and buildings, which was to be served by a stadium in every commune of the peninsula. Open to the public, these stadia were intended to further encourage individuals to partake in physical education, thereby giving them a serious propaganda role that extended beyond merely convincing the domestic audience of Fascism’s ability and desire to deliver its promises. While they demonstrated Fascist Italy’s cutting-edge engineering skills and architectural ambitions, stadia were specifically designed and regulated to practically and aesthetically challenge the former architectural orthodoxy of such buildings, thereby, in the process, stamping the regime’s identity upon every structure in sometimes apparently contradictory ways.

Chapter 4 develops these arguments by considering the city, stadium and club of Bologna, which forms the first of two comparative case studies. Besides launching the regime’s stadium-building campaign, the Littoriale also expressed and mediated the apparently contradictory identities of the regime and the locality. While making a significant contribution to the local party’s reorganisation and expansion of the city, it also conformed to
the demands of the regime’s national regeneration programme in every respect. Furthermore, the Littoriale became the spiritual home of Bologna Football Club. Its achievements drew further attention to the stresses between the various identities in Fascist Italy, as the provincial side that intensified the local sense of belonging gained an international fame that resulted in it being seen as a direct representative of the regime.

Following the construction of a new railway line through the Apennine mountains, Florence became a rival more than a close neighbour of Bologna, and the contrasting experiences of this city, club and new stadium, in Chapter 5, show how diverse the nature of local Fascism could be. Lacking a single representative team like Bologna FC, Fascism’s restructuring of national football encouraged leading Florentine political and cultural figures to form AC Fiorentina. Although the club never achieved the success and fame of its Bolognese rival, the city’s pride in its team was no less passionate. Only five years after the completion of the Littoriale, Florence’s Giovanni Berta stadium opened to the public. It was as aesthetically different to the Littoriale as could possibly be imagined. Yet, for reasons explored in Chapter 3 and further developed here, it was more than just a source of great international pride for the regime and the radical local party, as it also demonstrated the broad parameters of acceptability in Fascist architecture, thereby further indicating the scope for cultural diversity under the regime.

Both stadia also made significant contributions to calcio’s international importance for Fascism, which is considered in Chapter 6, by hosting matches during the 1934 World Cup tournament. A perfect propaganda opportunity for the government, it was the chance to sell the merits of its methods of rule to the domestic and foreign markets. Besides the stadia, the Italian national team provided the most convincing evidence of the regime’s successful national regeneration programme, which was arguably responsible for creating the generation of players that dominated international football in this era. However, even this unparalleled success uncovered fissures within Italian society. Questions were raised about the nationality of some members of the team, while the regime’s politicisation of the game also created problems for the national team and clubs when competing abroad, as they increasingly became the focus of anti-Fascist activities.

As a study of Fascist, national and local identities, this thesis naturally draws on a variety of primary source materials. The local state archives in Bologna and Florence hold considerable information, although not everything, relating to the construction of their respective cities’ stadia. This source material that addresses many questions raised from the
local perspective was complemented by an investigation of the *Archivio Centrale dello Stato* - central state archive - and that of the Foreign Ministry, both of which contained significant material relating to the international significance of *calcio*.

Unfortunately, some private archives remain closed, such as that of the national team coach Vittorio Pozzo, while it has been equally difficult to access any professional club's holdings, thereby making it impossible to assess exactly what may or may not have been available and of use to this study. With these problems of access in mind at the beginning of the project, the research for this thesis was designed to circumvent such obstacles by primarily assessing the type of information that was deliberately made available to the masses, principally through published books and the printed media, the sports press in particular. Naturally, perhaps more than any other source material, this requires deconstructing if the real meaning and intention of the literature under consideration is to be reached, such were the regime's censorship powers. As will be seen in the course of this investigation, even a superficial glance at the sport-specific press in this period, clearly indicates the bias of a media that was compelled to conform to this glaring abuse and restriction of freedom.

Nonetheless, as Tracy Koon states in her study of youth and Fascist education, it would be unwise to ignore the regime's use of the media 'to push a whole series of myths that were, by virtue of repetition and familiarity, more real to many Italians than the philosophical musings of Gentile or Rocco or even the universally quoted, quasi-inspired articles on fascism by Mussolini himself.' Consequently, it is within these myths, as propagated through the semi-official channels of the sports media, that we can uncover a view of the regime's idealised Fascist society and how it attempted to establish this as the desired norm for the aspirations of the masses. Uncovering this idealised national community and the various methods by which the regime attempted to impart this upon the masses is the consistent feature of the work of Koon, De Grazia, Berezin, Gentile, Cavazza, Schnapp and Ben-Ghiatt to name but a few. It is hoped this thesis makes a further contribution to their work.

If we are to assess and understand how the regime presented itself to the masses, then the print media is an unavoidable, key source of evidence and information. Consequently, this piece of research is more concerned with what was portrayed to the masses than

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necessarily determining the exact truth behind the potential myths and legends. Although newspapers were undoubtedly crucial sources of power for the regime, between 1922 and 1924 they were controlled by a mixture of informal partnerships with owners and financiers and outright *squadrismo*-style intimidation. Following the murder of Matteotti in 1924, Fascism’s control of the press became more systematic through co-ordinated and complementary legislative controls, intimidation and agreements with paper proprietors over the heads of editors. Although the need for strict censorship laws was reduced equally by the muting threat of forcible closure, the 1925 Press Censorship Law supplemented earlier legislative powers, in which Prefects could ‘warn’ editors and ultimately sequester ‘disloyal’ papers, by extending this authority to the public prosecutor.

The law also established the Order of Journalists to which all professionals had to belong if they were to work, although there were so few ideologically Fascist journalists that the regime was in no position to purge the profession of those who had trained under the auspices of the liberal free press. However, as Günter Berghaus outlines regarding artists, which is also applicable to the majority of cultural practitioners, even membership of the Syndicate did not necessarily have to restrict an individual’s work:

> Most artists found it expedient to adapt to the political changes by going through the necessary motions of indicating loyalty to the régime and then carrying on in their habitual mode of production....they joined the syndicates, issued a few pro-Fascist statements, and took advantage of the subsidies and gratuities purveyed by the régime.  

Nonetheless, journalists were supervised and standardised by Mussolini’s Press Office, under the tutelage of Lando Ferretti from 1926-28, which was a personal instrument of censorship that developed into the Fascist Propaganda Ministry. Thereafter, the press was expected to publicise positive news, which varied from promoting the achievements of the regime to playing down negative news such as natural disasters and train crashes.

Sport was a very good news story in this era, so much so that national triumphs were not just restricted to the sporting press but were also covered by mainstream dailies, such as *Il Popolo d’Italia*, Mussolini’s personal symbol and the official vehicle of the party. A relatively moderate publication, the daily publicised the regime’s mainstream thoughts,

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18 For example of Bologna see Chapter 4, pp.4-5.
Mussolini's more extreme or radical ideas often first appearing in *Il Tevere* where the public reaction could be gauged before making any firm policy commitments. Despite the mainstream press' growing interest in Italy's athletic ambassadors, the sports press naturally had a huge role to play in raising awareness of the sporting achievements of the nation, or the regime. Between 1924 and 1934 the sport-specific press expanded massively with a number of weekly and monthly publications complementing *La Gazzetta dello Sport* and the *Corriere dello Sport* (which became *Il Littoriale* in 1927) that sold, on average, 150,000 copies per day and over 300,000 at the weekend. As the party's leading promoter and theorist of sport, Lando Ferretti was made director of *La Gazzetta*, after which he turned the paper more towards representing the needs of the regime than the readership. In addition to these national publications most cities had their own local sports paper - often more than one - such as the Florentine *Lo Stadio* and Bologna's *La Voce Sportiva*.

By promoting the various achievements of Italian sport on a daily basis, the press contributed to the creation and affirmation of the regime's idealised image of Fascist Italy. Consequently, journalists were almost as important as the champion athletes, many becoming household names themselves through their extremely prominent, nationalistic, triumphal and occasionally xenophobic, accounts of the numerous Italian international victories in the Fascist epoch: Bruno Roghi, Emilio Colombo, Vittorio Varale, Emilio De Martino, to name but a few. It was not only the triumphant writing of Italian journalists that filled column inches following Italian successes, as albeit unsubstantiated praise from across Europe was regularly brought to the reader's attention in an effort to show how the regime's policies and national development were apparently winning European recognition and prestige.

In essence this was the ultimate rationale behind the regime's takeover of sport and its restructuring of *calcio*, as it sought to gain the international respect from sporting success that it was hoped would develop a shared sense of achievement, national experience and identity. In the ways that have been outlined in this introduction and that will be expanded upon in detail in the following chapters, *calcio* was a conduit for the subtle and psychological dissemination of the national myths, rituals and behaviours that were intended to accelerate the regeneration and nationalisation of the masses. This was supported more directly by the development, exploitation and politicisation of physical education, sport and football in

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24 For short biographies of the principal sports journalists of the era see *Ibid*, pp.335-37.
particular, all of which contributed to the creation of a real and imagined sense of community that was capable of pulling together the fissures in Fascist Italian society, before papering over them. As the nation's largest mass popular leisure-time activity, calcio almost certainly provided one of the best opportunities to achieve this, if indeed it was ever realistically possible.
2. ‘Mens sana in corpore sano.’

Making the Italian people idealistic and physically perfect was a task for sport in its many forms, as it demands discipline, order, rigour, sacrifice, a spirit of dedication and healthy morals, while engendering in the individual a desire for the struggle for victory. ... It was necessary to restructure the institutions, co-ordinate their, often chaotic activities, overcoming the reluctance of individual governors...building sports grounds in those areas in which their absence impeded serious preparation.\footnote{‘Come il Fascismo ha potenziato lo sport italiano’, \textit{Il Popolo d’Italia}, 28/10/32, p.69.}

This was \textit{Il Popolo d’Italia}’s celebration of ten years of Fascist rule during which the regime was said to have physically, morally and spiritually regenerated Italian society through sport, thereby overcoming what was thought to have been a root cause of many of the failures of Liberal Italy. Fascism’s investment in the nation’s sporting life was massive, ranging from the provision of facilities, such as gymasia and stadia, to a radical intervention in the education system and the development of leisure-time activities for the masses.

Exploiting the Socialist and Catholic failures to mobilise the masses through sport, Fascism took control and redirected the ‘opium of the masses’ towards its needs. Directing the combative, somewhat Darwinist struggle for victory that was sport, Fascism employed it as a means of regenerating society and subtly mobilising the masses. To achieve this, traditional attitudes to ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture were rethought. This brought sport and football, in particular, into the mainstream fold of Fascist culture and extended the game’s influence beyond its principal attraction as a spectator sport and into the realms of architecture and theatre.

By 1932, urban landscapes increasingly featured massive stadia in addition to the smaller sports grounds that every commune had been promised.\footnote{‘Come il Fascismo ha potenziato lo sport italiano’, \textit{Il Popolo d’Italia}, 28/10/32, p.69.} By encouraging the pursuit of physical exercise such facilities contributed to the regime’s demographic campaign that was intended to replenish and revitalise Fascist society. Theoretically, fitter bodies and occupied minds were not only distracted from the class struggle that threatened the organic collective as much as the regime itself, but they were also primed for mobilisation through the party’s structured organisation of leisure-time. In return for the regime’s investment in health and physical education, its provision of leisure-time activities and facilities, plus the reorganisation of ‘professional’ competitive sport, the utmost loyalty was demanded from all participants. This resulted in the politicisation of Italian sport at every level.
A latecomer to industrialisation, Italy showed few signs of social and economic upward mobility until the early 1900s, when technological advances and the new phenomena of leisure-time and disposable income began to stimulate the development of Italian sport and recreation. So apparent were the changes by 1910 that Ivanoe Bonomi, the Reformist Socialist and future Prime Minister (1921-22, 1944-45), reflected upon harder times of misery and famine when the revolutionaries could rely upon support in rural Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna:

Peasants went about barefoot and watched with irritation the first penny-farthings that passed through the dusty streets. They were a great luxury those bikes, expensive and needing a lot of time to learn how to ride them. Between those rich middle class cyclists and the barefooted peasants there was an abyss that was thought to have been insurmountable. Today, it is no longer so. The peasants of the flat plain of Padania...are no longer barefoot. They dress like citizens, read newspapers, use trains and...horror! they buy bicycles. The “machine” has been democratised....it has become the instrument of a new democracy. In fact it has evened out the classes: everybody goes by bicycle today, rich and poor, the farmer that goes to supervise the peasant, the artisan and the lord, the man and the woman. There are no more sexes, there are no more classes. This is the triumph of the bicycle.

As Bonomi suggested, in contrast to the young idealists who had achieved nothing it was those peasants who had seized the higher standard of living and taken an interest in sport, who were the true radicals. More than just an opportunity for recreation, the bicycle was a liberating means of transport that increased physical and social mobility. Although Bonomi’s assessment of the bicycle’s impact was almost certainly romanticised, its key role in a social revolution was supported by the considerable lifestyle and status changes that came with ownership. Furthermore, much of the geographical area of Padania that he referred to was extremely important in the development of Italian sport. It included the booming industrial triangle of Turin, Milan and Genoa, where the bourgeoisie established the factories that employed the masses who would become the spectators and participants of the future.

Had Italy followed the English model where the modern form of association football was quickly developed and evangelised by employers and priests in the working class industrial centres, then competitive sport might have found a spiritual home within the labour

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2 'Ogni comune deve avere il proprio campo sportivo', *La Nazione*, 18/12/29, p.5.
5 Ibid., p.1.
movement and religious circles.\textsuperscript{7} However, due to individual and historical circumstances, there was no consistent pattern to the development of sport in other countries.

Socialism and Catholicism were the two principal players in what sporting and recreational opportunities existed in pre-Fascist Italy, both having established societies to develop an ‘alternative culture’ that would contribute to their members’ personal development while cementing their loyalty. While their aims and interests were contrary to each other, they both competed with existing private middle-class clubs and state-sponsored, liberal bourgeois institutions that viewed sport merely in terms of developing patriotism and military strength.

In fact, it was the inability of successive government administrations in Liberal Italy to promote and develop mass sport for the masses that gave both the Left and the Church the perfect recruitment opportunity that they failed to take. Yet despite the apparent disinterest in sport among many parliamentary deputies and government ministers, some attempts were made to introduce physical education into schools. The essayist, literary historian and politician Francesco de Sanctis\textsuperscript{8} was one of the few to positively promote gymnastics and athletics. As one of the first to conceptualise the Italiano nuovo, he introduced a bill in 1878 that made the teaching of gymnastics in all schools compulsory. However, despite general support in the house, the De Sanctis law was unable to make a great impact on Italian youth due to difficulty in training teachers, apathy within the profession, plus a general lack of equipment and any effective national supervision.

An attempt to address many of the failings of the De Sanctis law was made in 1909, but its success was limited by the continuing disbelief in the benefits of physical over mental exercise. The result was a disparity between teachers of physical education and those who taught more traditional subjects. This was worsened by a pension system that only recognised physical education teachers from 1888 onwards, the first year in which they were put on the pay roll. For many of the older and most experienced staff who had joined the profession in the 1860s the future was bleak as they had lost in the region of 30 years’ pensionable salary, which further discouraged recruitment.\textsuperscript{9} Nonetheless, the 1909 law did introduce the concepts of health and militarism for the next generation by compelling all primary age children to undertake one half-hour of activity per day, with three hours per

\textsuperscript{7} The example of England is used as the world’s first industrialised nation.

\textsuperscript{8} De Sanctis was Minister for Public Instruction in 1878 and from 1879-81.

week designated for those in middle school. Moreover, trainee teachers in all disciplines had
to undertake an authoritative course of instruction before they could obtain their diploma.
However, despite the failure of successive governments to integrate the masses through sport,
both Socialism and Catholicism failed to fully exploit the potential opportunity.

The Catholic Church had a close relationship with sport from the mid-nineteenth
century onwards, with schools, colleges and oratories employing physical education as an
integral way of improving the discipline, morality and health of pupils. Thereafter, the
Church formed its own societies to recruit and retain young people while educating them in
the pathways of religion, through exercise and other means. Although its commitment to
physical education was specifically motivated by self-interest, it was also viewed as an
opportunity to reinforce patriotism and militarism while disseminating a more pious life
among society. With many individualistic activities condemned as distractions from
religious practice, one of the founders of the Catholic sports ideology, Father Giovanni
Semeria, extolled the educational value of ‘English’ and team games that contributed to the
formation of group spirit. Nonetheless, the Church did little to aid the spread of cycling and
football that were considered Anglo Saxon and Protestant activities. Instead, it promoted its
own brand of repetitive gymnastics.

Up until 1903 there was no significant political aspect to Catholic sport societies, but
this changed after “Fortitudo” of Bologna and “Voluntas” of Milan were refused entry into
the Italian Gymnastic Federation due to their confessional and political nature. With the
support of a few conservative Catholic deputies, elected following the Pope’s tactical
decision, in 1904, to relax the non expedit decree that outlawed Catholic participation in
national politics, Giolitti was able to retain control of parliament. In return, he pressurised the
gymnastic federation into rescinding its earlier decision. However, by 1906, possibly in
response to the 1500 or more members that had participated in a gymnastic meeting in Rome
the previous year, the government re-emphasised its opposition to these Catholic societies.
The response was the formation of the Federazione delle Associazioni Sportive Cattoliche

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10 F.M. Varrasi, Economia, Politica e Sport in Italia (1925-1935), Firenze, Fondazione Artemio Franchi, 1997,
12 Semeria was one of the most well known Italian Catholics in this period. A talented orator, he participated in
World War I as a military chaplain of the Supreme command in the Udine area. See, Istituto della Enciclopedia
13 A. Papa, & G. Panico, Storia sociale del calcio in Italia. Dai club pionieri alla nazione sportiva (1887-1945),
(FASCI) - Catholic Sports Association. Initially consisting of sixteen societies, there were over 200 by 1910 with over 10,000 members.\textsuperscript{15} More than just an alternative federation, the FASCI competed directly with official sports associations, mimicking their structures and training programmes while boasting similar numbers of affiliated members.\textsuperscript{16}

Despite indicating the Church’s awareness of sport’s potential to reach and recruit the masses, the FASCI was unable to establish a monopoly over Catholic sport. From 1918 onwards many new societies preferred to seek recognition from the official sporting bodies, while Pope Pio XI further undermined its authority by excluding it from the decision-making body of Catholic Action. Although weak, the FASCI still delayed the Fascist centralisation of sport and physical education. While the regime was endeavouring to reach a co-existence agreement with the Church that was eventually established by the 1929 Lateran Accords, it was unable to brutally and decisively repress the Catholic associations. Instead, it chose to slowly and indirectly erode them by forming such groups as the \textit{Ente Nazionale per l’Educazione Fisica} (ENEF) - National Organisation for Physical Education - in 1923, and the \textit{Milizia Volontaria Sicurezza Nazionale} (MVSN) - National Voluntary Security Militia - in 1924, which was given exclusive responsibility for the provision of physical education. Along with Balilla, the Fascist youth organisation that took control of physical education in 1928, these institutions eroded the FASCI’s potential to impact upon the lives of the young until 1927, when the regime practically liquidated it with a measure that restricted its actions to mere oratory.\textsuperscript{17} Rather than wait for the final blow, the Catholic associations disbanded voluntarily.

Theoretically, this alienation of a natural source of support might have paved the way for socialist sport to make significant inroads into the rural and urban working class, but for different reasons it too proved equally unsuccessful. Leisure-time activities for the working and peasant class masses had existed in the middle of the nineteenth century among the mutual aid societies of Piedmont and Liguria,\textsuperscript{18} whose activities could realistically have been attuned to the purposes of politics and propaganda. Yet despite the 1907 formation of the Socialist Sports Union, a branch of the Workers International, the leisure time of the masses remained unstructured and apolitical.

\textsuperscript{15} Varrasi, \textit{Economia, Politica e Sport in Italia}, p.118.
\textsuperscript{16} Bassetti, \textit{Storia e storie dello sport}, p.67.
\textsuperscript{17} A. Ghirelli, \textit{Storia del Calcio in Italia}, Torino, Einaudi, 1990, p.93.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid.}, p.110.
Socialising the masses was not helped by the delayed and limited nature of Italian industrialisation. The earlier and more rapid process in Germany had resulted in a mass, relatively united working class that provided the market for an alternative socialist culture. Yet, by 1900, it was still unrealistic to refer to Italy as a truly industrialised nation. The net result was a correspondingly small and disparate working class. This barrier to the development of socialist sport was further reinforced by ideological Marxist interpretations. Some viewed sport and leisure as opiates of the masses that inhibited the development of class-consciousness among the young, thereby distracting them from the class struggle. Others, such as Gramsci, argued that it was the combination of culture and the state, thus cohesion and coercion that maintained the status quo. Rather than explain historical change, his theory interpreted why the status quo remained intact. Viewing state activity as crucial to the maintenance of a dominant group in society, Gramsci ‘redefined the state as force plus consent to hegemony armoured by coercion in which political society organised force and civil society provided consent’. According to this model, the control and direction of culture, in which sport, football, leisure-time and recreation are included in this study, had an integral role in maintaining the hegemony of the ruling class. Either way, sport in general did not receive blanket support among the Left.

Consequently, socialism was slow to take up the challenge and embrace sport, occasionally even going so far as to recommend direct action against what it saw as a preserve of the rich. In one example the daily newspaper Avanti, of which Benito Mussolini was the Director during his socialist period, openly invited readers to sabotage cycle races by littering the streets with nails. In 1910, the Federazione Italiana Giovanile Socialista (FGIS) - Young Socialist Federation - also took an intransigent stance against sport at its third national congress, arguing that it debilitated and destroyed the human body and generally contributed to the degeneration of the species.

Other members of the movement already appreciated the danger such a position posed, for by excluding itself from the leisure time of the masses the FGIS was rejecting an

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21 Jarvie & Maguire, Ibid., p.114.
22 Bassetti, Storia e storie dello sport, p.64.
23 Quoted in Varrasi, Economia, Politica e Sport in Italia, p.112.
opportunity to influence the development of sport. Ironically, some members of the industrial bourgeoisie also recognised this and began to form corporate societies. The socialists responded in the only manner they knew how - another polemic in *Avanti!* Irritated by the inability of the young revolutionaries to recognise the opportunities that sport and cycling in particular were providing for social change, Bonomi questioned their physical and mental capacity for revolutionary activity:

> You cannot be young and call yourself a revolutionary if you do not have an irresistible urge to sacrifice yourself to others; to throw away your life in a beautiful gesture for something great and good.... You do not die on the barricades because at the first gunshot, even the revolutionaries show a clean pair of heels.... What remains? What remains is the struggle against the forces of nature; the great moral gymnastics of conquering an inaccessible peak, driving a frenetic motor race, or flying over the mountains or the sea.  

Essentially, he believed the revolutionaries had been weakened by the decadence that many perceived to have been infiltrating and degenerating all social classes in Europe from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Yet, while Bonomi suggested the young revolutionaries were no longer worthy of the name, he also identified both a cause and a solution: ‘Who does not know how to train his body to resist inferior self-centredness, does not truly know how to open his soul to the joy of courageous victory, he is not a revolutionary, he is only an incompetent and an idler.’ Although generally agreeing with Bonomi’s idealistic vision, the socialist Giovanni Zibordi suggested he had overestimated sport’s capacity to instigate revolutionary change:

> The generation under 20, entering a world of relatively good conditions, finding the way paved by the older citizens, neglects our organisation, associations and papers, giving itself excessively, uniquely and madly to sport.... the bourgeoisie undoubtedly intends to spread through its newspapers, the contagious microbe of feverish sporting infatuation, an illness far from the healthy sport practised as one of the aspects of human existence and vigorous youth.

Despite his reservations, Zibordi still recommended that the socialist movement embrace and utilise sport rather than reject it as a bourgeois evil. As part of an alternative culture he believed it was far better to ‘guide and channel this passion for sport; offering to provoke an interest in gymnasia among the fit, young, irrational intellectuals of each region...for the education of the body and of the mind’. The Russian PSI member Angelica Balabanoff continued the debate by attacking the newspaper for wasting important space on

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25 Ibid., p.2.
27 Ibid., p.2.
such 'a secondary issue as sport', arguing that races and prizes were a moral and spiritual danger for class solidarity as they represented the proletariat's struggle for the price of a loaf of bread in a capitalist society. Using the analogy of cycle racing, she suggested that prize money had removed any previously existing Corinthian values, as competitors no longer stopped to help another who may have fallen, as this would seriously reduce their chance of victory. More dangerously, the individual’s misfortune could quickly be turned to the advantage of another, thereby encouraging competitors to be more selfish, which directly contradicted earlier assertions about the positive effects of sport. In Balabanoff's opinion: 'the preoccupation of sport...is taking youngsters away from the organisations and buying sports newspapers is almost always a sure cause and effect of their non participation in the class struggle.'

Perhaps in response to such debates, some examples of socialist, organised physical education and leisure time began to appear. In 1912 a group of 'red cyclists' was formed to reclaim the fidelity of the masses through cycling trips and excursions. Wearing distinctive uniforms, they spread socialist propaganda across the plain of Padania, organising rides and distributing pamphlets before moving onto the next town. There was also an increasing working-class interest in trips to the countryside and the mountains, which led to the formation of the Unione Operai Escursionisti (UOEI) - Italian Workers Excursionists Union - in 1911. Campaigning against alcohol and promoting a programme of activities designed to improve workers' mental and physical health while encouraging an interest in the outdoors, the UOEI could claim 40 sections and over 10,000 members by 1914. Yet despite its imaginative ideals, the socialist journalist Giancinto Serrati suggested the UOEI was unable to remain independent as many of its leaders were 'consummate politicos' taking the organisation towards the political right.

Despite these pre-1914 socialist initiatives, the movement only began to formally acknowledge the virtues of sport in the years following the Great War. In 1917 the Unione
Libera Italiana del Calcio (ULIC) - Free Italian Football Union - was formed in Milan to defend the game for the less wealthy classes. Completely contravening the statutes of the Federazione Italiana Giuoco del Calcio (FIGC) - Italian Football Association - ULIC held liberty from the FIGC, no taxes or fines as its political and economic foundations and organised as many tournaments as possible under these auspices. Despite the fundamentals of its ideology, the organisation never assumed a class-based character and by 1920 was seeking a rapprochement with the FIGC that was formally concluded in 1926. Thereafter, ULIC became an autonomous section of the FIGC that was still responsible for the diffusion of the game, albeit under the Federation’s control. It was a classic example of the regime’s preference of taking over and redirecting existing, problematic organisations, rather than abolishing them.

Despite these initiatives, a certain amount of intellectual soul searching regarding the role of sport continued to prevent the Left from reaching even an acceptable compromise solution. Incredibly, in 1923, with the Fascist government firmly in power, similar arguments were still raging in the socialist press. Fanning the flames and expanding the argument, Grospierre drew attention to the increasingly popular and even more dangerous practice of spectating that enabled the bosses to further exploit the workforce:

...the workers could not find long-term satisfaction...watching the movements of a ball under agile feet, when terminal misery awaits them at the exit. These youths need to realise that tomorrow will be the same for them as it was for their fathers.... Long live sport, but also long live the struggle for bread.

The narcissistic aspect of personal physical development was also thought to have negative implications for the prospect of a fully socialised society. Nonetheless, arguably due to the changing political climate in Italy, some began to suggest that socialism should merely guard against these maladies as opposed to discrediting, neglecting or combating sport. Serratti made just such a proposition in Sport e Proletariato, the weekly publication of the Associazione proletaria per l’educazione fisica (APEF) - the workers’ association for

33 G.M. Serrati, ‘Lo Sport e la classe lavoratrice’, Sport e Proletariato, 14/7/23, p.3.
36 A. Grospierre, ‘Gli sports e la folla’, Sport e Proletariato, 14/7/23, p.3.
37 ‘Lo Sport e la classe lavoratrice’, Sport e Proletariato, p.3.
physical education. One of the first serious attempts to analyse sport, the APEF’s “internationalist” publication attempted to diffuse it as an instrument of class struggle.38

Despite arguing that sport had become the principle means by which the dominant classes had secured the loyalty of young workers, Serrati still believed that physical recreation could prove ‘a valid instrument of organisation, propaganda and class struggle’, but it was ‘necessary to know how to use it’.39 By 1934, that knowledge was still clearly lacking and, according to Carlo Levi, the mania for sport had in fact depoliticised the masses. Illustrating his argument with national stereotypes, Levi drew a distinction between Italian and other European workers. The French were interested in elections and financial scandals, the English in government, India, and the nature of Jesus, while the Italians were ‘reduced to interesting themselves, like babies, in the gratuitous bounce of a ball. In free countries the love of sport has not become an exclusive passion; and that is, not so much of a mania or monstrousness…or sadness like here.”40 This was what he believed had enabled the Fascist government to exert political control through sport:

The man who jumps, chases after a ball or swims like a frog does not have time to think of politics: therefore sport is his favourite. But left free he could become dangerous: it is necessary for him to be regulated, ordered…except to raise a special class of champions to put in the window for the glory of all.41

Besides knowing how to best exploit sport, Serratti suggested that it was important to differentiate between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ sports, which were loosely defined as those that did and did not train the individual for the benefit of the mass:

To avoid every vice and corruption it is necessary to develop only those sports that give the individual more energy [and] do not isolate him from the collective…. Like group gymnastics, rowing, football, which at the same time as developing the individual, attune singular with social actions and exercise the spirit of discipline.42

His summary, ironically and albeit unwittingly, sketched a blueprint for Fascist sport that was further embellished by another contributor to Sport e Proletariato who espoused the domestic and international importance of sportsmen: ‘Sportsmen do not need a great culture; but in Italy or abroad they might find themselves among people of a certain standing, administrative and political authorities, fans and journalists; thus it is crucial they know how to speak their language well.”43 As opposed to aiding the struggle of the proletarian

39 Ibid., p.3.
40 Bianchi, ‘Sport (Dall’Italia)’, Giustizia e Libertà, p.47.
41 Ibid., p.49.
42 ‘Lo Sport e la classe lavoratrice’, Sport e Proletariato, p.3.
collective, developing athletes for the good of the national organism became a keystone of Fascist sports policy and nowhere was it more important than abroad where the sporting ambassadors came into their own.

As far as socialist sport was concerned, Serrati recommended reforming the UOEI into the Gruppo Socialista Amici dell’Arte - Socialist Group of Friends of the Arts - thereby extending its aims and ‘making it the nucleus of a bigger association for the education of the working classes’. In Sport e Proletariato’s inaugural editorial he had already called for the formation of an Italian Workers Sport Federation to defend and emancipate the proletariat. However, by 1923 it was too late for Serrati, the magazine, or any organised socialist sport movement to make any contribution to the fight against Fascism through mobilisation of the masses. On 10 December 1923, following the publication of an article announcing the imminent formation of the Italian Workers Sport Federation, the publication’s printing offices, which also served Lo Stato operaio and Sindacato rosso, were destroyed by Fascist squads and its production suspended.

Italian Socialism was too slow to embrace the phenomenon of sport and the Workers Sport movement that provided a real alternative to bourgeois and middle-class groups and was capable of making a significant contribution to the development of an alternative socialist culture. A truly international organisation, the Workers Sport movement was an opportunity to develop health, solidarity and culture among working class men and women. Its international strength was demonstrated at the first Worker Olympics in Frankfurt in 1924, which was attended by competitors from over nineteen countries and 150,000 spectators. This reflected the greater development of socialist sport in countries elsewhere in Europe, such as Germany and Belgium, that had better appreciated the opportunities for the mass mobilisation of the working class. Not only did sport develop a sense of community among athletes, it also improved physical fitness that could be easily attuned to more militaristic needs if required. However, restricted by dogma and narrow minds, Italian socialism was unable to harness and mould this potential hotbed of support, which Stefano Pivato suggests may have been due to its peculiar and ‘substantially “agrarian”’ nature.

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44 ‘Lo Sport e la classe lavoratrice’, Sport e Proletariato, p.3.
45 ‘Come e Perché’, Sport e Proletariato, 14/7/23, p.1.
In the fight against Fascism, socialism and the Catholic Church both failed to see anything other than sport's military use. Equally, neither appreciated or understood the factor of community that was essential for the preparation of a military force that would be prepared to fight and die for the nation. Fascism, however, understood this crucial aspect of community and fully embraced sport and recreation as mediums through which its vision of society could be disseminated throughout the peninsula. This perhaps best explains why, unlike in England, the boom in the proletarian sport of calcio corresponded more with the Fascist epoch than the early years of Italian industrialisation and the growth of the workers movement.48

Fascism 1 Rest of Italy 0. (The Fascist attitude to sport)

Lando Ferretti derided both the description of sport as a ‘mania’ and the old arguments that connected it with the decline of Italian thought. Contrary to intellectuals throughout Europe who linked the decline of the ancient Greek and Roman Empires to the increase in games and sporting activities over more cerebral pursuits,49 he argued that periods of artistic and intellectual decadence had never coincided with the greatest veneration of physical education. Suggesting quite the opposite, he believed that Greece had reached its artistic and intellectual apogee during the fifth century when the Olympic Games also showed the Empire at its physical peak. Rather than one impacting negatively upon the other, Ferretti believed that intellectual, scientific and physical pursuits flourished and declined symbiotically. Consequently, it was intellectual decadence that had led to the development of games at the Roman Campo Marzio, where participants competed for money rather than in veneration of strength and for the benefit of society, civilisation and the motherland.50

Fascism intended to help Italians better understand and appreciate the true meaning of sport, which was not necessarily about spectacular boxing matches that created huge takings and even bigger celebrities. As Ferretti clarified, it was there to ‘reflect, penetrate and elevate the masses. The mass is its sole objective, not the individual.’51 Sporting champions were still important role models for the masses and the coming generations, as they showed what

51 Ibid., pp.1-2.
could be achieved through intellectual and physical pursuits that began with the united, organic, psycho-physical system of virile education, as conceived and implemented by the regime.

However, competitive and spectator sport still carried the considerable baggage of having contributed to the degeneration of the nation. Despite its democratic origins, some commentators were suspicious of cycling and in some respects it was a victim of its own success. While bicycle manufacturers had initially flourished, they soon began to experience increasing difficulty in maintaining sales levels, which according to one contemporary sports journalist was due to the industry’s saturation of the national market prior to developing a foreign outlet. Giuseppe Ambrosini argued the opposite in *Lo Sport Fascista*, suggesting that it was the condition of the country’s impoverished infrastructure that was far more threatening to the pastime’s expansion and the very concept of a unified nation as a whole. Cycling’s rapid development created a variety of concerns and, somewhat ironically, it was idolised cyclists such as Alfredo Binda that caused the greatest concern. As Ambrosini pointed out: ‘Binda is a great champion and worthy of the predecessors, but he is the purest expression of rationalism applied to sport, which is the absolute negation of his spiritual and moral content…. From “girardenghismo” we have fallen into “bindismo”’. The huge success of Italian cyclists created a massive fan base that encouraged *La Gazzetta* to launch the ‘Giro d’Italia’ race in 1909. However, as the journalist Vittorio Varale argued in one of his regular contributions to *Lo Sport Fascista*, it was still important that ‘the events, or the “glories”, of these and other champions be contained within just limits and that the mass of the young speak in more measured terms in keeping with the needs of the day’.

It demonstrated the regime’s concern about the emergence of idols and superstars that were the unavoidable by-products of Italian successes in mass popular events. The regime’s concern increased when idols began to emerge from team sports, most importantly the national game of *calcio* that created even more challenging problems and allegories. If, on the basis that he was scoring the goals that effectively won matches, the centre forward of a successful team was seen as more important than the collective, there was a danger that the regime’s organic national team ethic might be undermined just as easily. Thus, creating champions and controlling their fame became one of the regime’s primary contradictions.

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53 Ibid., p.65.
54 Ibid., p.64.
Even once Fascism had taken control of sport these issues refused to disappear. As competitive events expanded, the demand for victory continued to raise individual profiles, such as 'the duci [chiefs] of cycling', to the point where they were said to have begun rivaling the popularity of the Duce himself. This concern with sporting superstars contributed some fundamental principles to the Dopolavoro movement, most notably the abolition of classification and ranking from sports practised by the masses and the removal of victory prizes.

More threatening was the idea that sport contributed to the alleged decadence in society. Initially stimulated by a number of European military failures that highlighted declining physical standards among army recruits, the pseudo scientific obsession with the apparent degeneration of the species was thought to have been worsened by the emergence of sport and its related 'vices' of competition, alcohol, gambling and spectating, which once again forced comparisons with the Roman and Greek empires.

In France, Benedict Augustin Morel had concerned himself with the hereditary nature of degenerative ailments, diseases, disorders and how they transformed and returned to corrupt the moral and physical make-up of individuals, families and society as a whole. Classifying this pattern of heredity and pathological change as *dégénérance* (degeneration), his treatise was more than just a negative assessment of society's ills as it also considered the potential to regenerate society through programmes of spiritual and physical education.

In Italy, the criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso similarly attempted to modernise this type of anatomy by introducing the concept of anthropometry. By precisely measuring the dimensions and relations of parts of the body, he believed it was possible to identify and manage potential dangers to organic society. Like Morel, Lombroso viewed the body and conduct of the criminal as an "atavistic" throwback to the evolutionary past, thereby further illuminating the potential impact of an individual upon society. Through anthropometric studies he suggested that it was possible to freeze evolution and isolate the inherited backwardness that plagued the state and nation.

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56 Bianchi, 'Sport (Dall'Italia)', *Giustizia e Libertà*, p.48.
58 For example: the Boer War 1899-1902, Franco-Prussian War 1870-71 and Italo-Ethiopian Wars 1887-1895.
Although Fascism was to some extent a response to the theory of degeneration, it conflicted with liberal opinion as to how the problem should be identified and overcome if the race was to be strengthened. Sport was to play a pivotal role in creating the ‘new man’ who would confront and overcome the sources of degeneration and rebuild the nation in the process. Having refuted the argument that the phenomena of sport and games was merely a modern incarnation of Roman ‘bread and circuses’, Ferretti proposed an alternative to traditional views of culture by arguing that it was now necessary to see it in both physical and spiritual terms, that being the psychophysiological. Whereas sport and culture had previously pursued their apparently mutually exclusive interests, Ferretti’s new mantra was: ‘fascist sport and fascist culture for fascist Italy.’

**Fascist Culture**

Despite Ferretti’s pronouncement, it is still difficult to establish what exactly Fascist culture was or consisted of, so heterogeneous were its influences. One useful perspective on the debates surrounding Fascist culture has been provided by Vito Zagarrio, who suggested the issue may be seen in a number of different ways:

a) the degree to which cultural life was either autonomous of or dependent on the dictatorship.

b) the new form assumed by culture in a mass society, in which culture also comes to mean customs and collective behaviour.

c) the regime’s cultural policy.

d) the creation of a cultural plan by the Fascist intelligentsia aimed at the development of a new ruling class.

Even before the Fascist regime formed its first administration many intellectuals believed that Liberal Italy had become a ‘cultural colony’, left to the mercy of more dominant foreign cultures. The Fascist regime had to develop its own national culture to mobilise society behind the movement and the party. However, as Victoria De Grazia has argued, despite its attempt to acquire ‘a measure of cultural legitimacy’ by adopting the intellectual elite’s traditional disdain for the mass popular format and reinforcing the class divisions of ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, it could not permanently ignore its eclectic melting pot of inspiration.

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64 Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, p.7.

Fascism’s interpretation of mass popular and elitist culture could be influenced by Futurism, the avant-garde and romanità (romanness, that of being Roman). Such heterogeneity partly explained its lack of a clearly defined direction, but it was this lack of a doctrinal blueprint that enabled the regime to include many thinkers and creators within society, who might otherwise have felt or even wished to be excluded. While permitting a certain element of free expression, it also avoided the unnecessary exclusion of useful cultural practitioners and opinion formers. In an argument that was further developed by Marla Stone, Günter Berghaus summarised the cause and effect of the regime’s cultural policy:

Mussolini was not like Hitler when it came to artistic matters. He had little interest in the arts and kept himself out of the aesthetic debates of the period...He only issued general orders and left it to his functionaries to implement them or translate them into concrete directives....The result was the promotion of a rather vague conception of Fascist art that left artists considerable leeway in their choice of subject matter, style, composition, format etc.66

At the national level its practitioners and purveyors were a diverse mixture of personalities and party functionaries, while lecturers and teachers worked the localities. By deliberately monumentalising traditional forms teachers protected and reinforced their positions as the purveyors and interpretors of culture. This strengthens Zagarrio’s argument, in addition to those of Berghaus and Stone, that it is better to speak of a general plan for the organisation of consensus through culture, of which the most important aspect was subservience to the regime in return for relative cultural autonomy.67

Despite its lack of concrete definition, culture was undoubtedly one of the key areas through which the regime envisaged constructing a Fascist civilisation that would reflect its sense of continuity and community of ideas and thought. Of primary importance in this vision was the consistent reference to Imperial Rome and the cult of romanità. As Mussolini stated:

“Rome is our point of departure and our point of reference; it is our symbol and, if you like, our myth. We dream of a Roman Italy, an Italy that is wise, strong, disciplined and imperial. Much of the spirit of Ancient Rome is being born again in Fascism; the Lictorian fasces are Roman, our war machine is Roman, our pride and our courage are Roman too.”68

While this suggests that Fascism was intent on both spiritually and physically recreating the Roman Empire, there was also an undeniably modernist aspect to its cultural policies. This

was reflected its attitude to architecture where classical and modernistic visions peaceably coexisted, such example as the traditionalist Biblioteca Nazionale (National Library) and the modernist Giovanni Berta stadium. Both built in Florence by the local party, they demonstrated Mussolini's prevarication, inability, or lack of desire to commit to one particular style. Consequently, whether a reflection of the eclectic nature of its origins or the leader's indecision, all forms of Fascist culture were often more distinguishable in style than content. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the football stadia constructed during the Fascist era, the contradictions of which will be considered in later chapters.

Sport and physical education was another area in which culture was directed, or at least guided in an attempt to mass mobilise Fascist society. Despite the fears of physical degeneration and the lack of a governing body to supervise the development of Italian sport, the nation’s performances in the 1908 and 1912 Olympic games were both remarkable and arguably a result of De Sanctis’ apparently ineffective attempt to introduce gymnastics and virile education into middle schools. His cocktail of spiritual and physical education became a key component of Fascist education that was symbolised by the Libro e moschetto - book and musket. As Ferretti observed, exercising the body, inflaming the spirit and stimulating perfect discipline was the by-product of sport, all qualities that came to the fore in 1915 when Italy finally entered the Great War.

When the long awaited news arrived in that late twilight of May, and the doors of the schools closed as everybody left for the war...we truly felt like knights of a great ideal. Sport had prepared us to confront each battle.

Fossati, captain of the national football team; world rowing champion Sinigaglia, fell heroically in the front line. And in the universities, when peace was concluded, many who left on 24 May were missing... but, prepared in body and spirit by virile games, beyond and against the spirit and methods of school...they confronted and wanted to make the supreme sacrifice to create with blood, the beautiful and great Italy of today. 70

As he continued to explain for many years in a variety of different publications, war was the 'crucible that effected the metamorphosis of Italian identity, where the men of the old generation found the purification of spirit in the blood dedicated to the motherland'. 71

However, satisfaction with the army's wartime performance was not universal, as others argued that Italy's 'mutilated victory' was a result of the moral and political failings of the education system. When assessing the Italian military performance Ferretti carefully avoided the pitfalls, contradictions and dilemmas that awaited him. As a Fascist reliant on support from ex-serviceman organisations, criticising the armed forces would have been...

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69 ibid., p.189.
70 L. Ferretti, Il Libro dello Sport, Roma, Libreria del Littorio, 1928, p.69.
71 'La cultura e lo sport in un discorso di Lando Ferretti', Il Littoriale, pp.1-2.
unwise, even if their efforts had often amounted to a display of considerable ineptitude. By administering praise through the medium of sport he was able to avoid crediting the old liberal regime with any positive role, while outlining the fundamentals of Fascist sport policy in the process: individual physical and mental fitness for the benefit of the organic whole.

*War Without the Shooting*

A burgeoning number of young Italian Futurist writers shared Fascism's faith in the merits of a physical culture that blended tradition and modernity in the restoration of gymnastics and a new awareness of the machine and speed. Although games such as football were less admired their potential contribution to the creation of the *Italiano nuovo*, a key figure in the movement's national regeneration plan, was still recognised. According to George Mosse, they hoped this new Fascist man who was disciplined and loved combat and confrontation would 'proclaim Italy's glory through his personal drive and energy. Futurism took the concepts of manliness, energy and violence, and sought to tear them loose from the historical traditions in which conventional nationalist movements had anchored them.'

Through this synthesis of manliness, violence, combat and struggle, it was hoped the *Italiano nuovo* could spiritually and physically regenerate the nation, thereby completing the unification process that the current generation had been incapable of achieving. Besides inspiring the Fascist movement, Mosse explains how the Great War was also a crucial event in the evolution of the 'new man'. It 'was precisely the experience of war that, according to Fascism, forged veterans capable of leading the new men of the future'. If only those who had faced death could understand the meaning of sacrifice, it was entirely appropriate that Fascist society should exist in a state of permanent war where battles, struggles and fights were applied to a number of national issues that varied from money and births to internal enemies and sport.

Academia also failed to see any virtues in competitive sports such as football. At best it was profoundly indifferent, with many academics thinking it inconceivable that universities might become venues of sporting activity. Even where such teams did emerge in Italy, like

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the football club of the University of Rome, they were merely tolerated as student extravagances and rarely promoted as healthy means of self-improvement.\textsuperscript{74}

Fascism’s ability to draw from complex and often contradictory ideological roots enabled it to employ Futurist ideas of renewal and rebirth that focussed on the glory of sacrifice, rather than dwell on the military disasters of the past. Even the failed Imperial exploits in Africa in the Liberal era had positive aspects, as those who were killed/sacrificed were said to have shown their personal qualities in addition to those of the nation.\textsuperscript{75} A huge percentage of Great War army conscripts also came from sports clubs and societies. Just prior to the Italian entry they already had lost 50 per cent of sportsmen, after which full mobilisation was said to have accounted for the remainder.\textsuperscript{76}

Recording individual acts of bravery and courage by former sporting soldiers, which usually culminated in their glorious death and posthumous decoration, was one example of the type of nationalistic writing that became \textit{Lo Sport Fascista}’s trademark. Inspired by the motto, ‘the programme, the faith and the flag: Loyalty’,\textsuperscript{77} the monthly magazine’s remit was to show the world how Fascism had developed a new sporting aesthetic. Through the submissions of well-known journalists, national sporting figures and members of the political hierarchy, the magazine’s sole obligation was to serve the nation in its work by documenting the regime’s development of Italian sport. As stated in the October 1929 editorial: ‘We lay out our simple words...in homage to the cause of national rebirth. This is true liberty...this is healthy independent journalism.’\textsuperscript{78} Claiming objectivity as a fundamental principle, \textit{Lo Sport Fascista} portrayed itself as an instrument of education that would evaluate, criticise and discuss sport without slavish adherence to outdated forms and concepts. However, the PNF Secretary Augusto Turati’s praise of the magazine as one perfectly in tune with the Fascist spirit, hardly reinforced such claims of independence.\textsuperscript{79} Besides establishing and illustrating the value of Italian sport that had been overhauled by the party and the Duce, the magazine intended to influence contemporary and future society by permanently recording the regime’s reawakening of Italian youth.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{76} ‘Nel decennio della Vittoria ricordiamo il contributo dato dallo sport alla guerra ed esaltiamo il sacrificio degli Sportivi caduti sul campo di battaglia’, \textit{Lo Sport Fascista}, 5, 1928, p.42.
\textsuperscript{77} L. Ferretti, ‘Programma’, \textit{Lo Sport Fascista}, 6, 1928, p.4.
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Ibid.}, p.2.
Believing in the regenerative powers of struggle and even death, Fascism mythologised the many amateur and ‘professional’ sports stars that were killed in the Great War, such as the cyclist Carlo Oriano who was one of the first winners of the Giro d'Italia. In death, he was joined by weightlifters, athletes, climbers and mountaineers - who were indispensable during combat in the Alps - rowers, gymnasts and footballers, to name but a few. Among the many footballers was Dr Canfari, ex-player and president of the Associazione Italiana Arbitri (AIA) - Italian referees association; Dalmazzo, Croce, Corbelli and Colombo, all of Juventus; Virgilio Fossatti, captain of the national team and Milan’s Internazionale who died at Montefalcone in 1916; and his national team colleague Attilio Trere, who was a mutilated survivor.81

According to Lo Sport Fascista, those who died in combat were ‘heroes in the purest sense of the word; heroes whose memory and example will last long in the history of Italy; heroes that left reality to immortalise themselves in legend.’82 In this way, the magazine firmly reinforced the memory of those heroes in the minds of contemporary athletes and their fans. “‘Always present!’ was the password of sportsmen. Always present! When the homeland calls its sons to defend it against external and internal enemies....sportsmen always arrive at the double.”83 Although not on the scale of the Great War, 1930s athletes were still expected to risk their lives on the battlefield and give their best on the sports field. As Ferretti outlined prior to the 1936 Berlin Olympics, they were all role models and ambassadors for the regime, paying debts of respect to their fallen heroes:

Like us, like all sportsmen, like all Italians, the athletes at Berlin remember and see the heroes; they feel them nearby, sharing the anxiety of the conquest until the joy of victory.... this time, to be worthy of Mussolini’s Italy, it is no longer enough to compete with all your strength; it is necessary to go further, to give more, to reach the finishing line exhausted.84

By the mid 1930s, so many soldiers had died during the Imperial campaign in North Africa that the President of the FIGC’s 7th zone established the Coppa Emilia, a calcio tournament ‘to honour the memory of footballers, gloriously fallen in the AOI’ (Africa Orientale Italiana).85 Comprising of eight teams, the Coppa Emilia was awarded to the winning squad’s section of the Associazione Famiglie Caduti - Association for the Families

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81 'Nel decennio della Vittoria…’, Lo Sport Fascista, pp.43-48.
82 Ibid., pp.44-45.
83 Ibid., p.49.
84 'Nel nome dei morti, per la gloria dei vivi’, Lo Sport Fascista, 8, 1936, p.12.
of Fallen Soldiers. To avoid devaluing the memory of those loved ones from the associations whose teams failed to win the competition and may indeed have finished last, prizes donated by the various regions were awarded to all participating teams. However, without diminishing the glory attached to those sportsmen martyred and wounded in the Great War, it was no longer enough to merely sacrifice oneself or to die in vain. Fascism now demanded victories. For this, preparation of the spirit alone was not enough, it needed to be supported by a body capable of reaching all the targets and victories that the Duce prepared for the nation.

Of course, the powers of renewal and regeneration did not necessarily require death. This was particularly applicable to the sporting arena where the natural passage of time limited a champion’s reign at the top. Having achieved supremacy, they naturally set the standard to which others aspired. Metaphorically speaking, they were there to be shot at, which resulted in fierce competition and a continual turnover and improvement in top-level athletes in every sport. In his contemporary biography of Arpinati’s career, the respected Fascist Marcello Gallian made just such an observation about a former long jumper:

... champion for one hour, hero for a minute; tomorrow he will return to his job: another will win the next Olympics and he will pass into the world of the unknown.

... What can be more beautiful than that champion who returns to his job and will give to another a way of surpassing him.

Nationalist and politicised sports writing also came increasingly into vogue under Fascism, as the regime sought to exploit the massive market of fans to disseminate its message, with most editors more than happy to oblige. In 1925, the Bolognese weekly La Striglia Sportiva headlined its first edition with: ‘Sportsmen, give ONE DOLLAR to the motherland.’ Encouraging fans to play their part in the ‘battle for the Lira’, the editorial clarified its envisaged role for sport in the nation’s future, in what was more akin to the pages of a political or party newspaper: ‘For us, we do not see sport simply as a method of physical

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86 Ibid.
88 Ferretti, Esempi e idee, p.189.
89 M. Gallian, Arpinati Politico e Uomo di Sport, Roma, Casa Editrice Pinciana, 1928, pp.42-43. From a bourgeois family, Gallian participated in the occupation of Fiume led by Gabrielle D’Annunzio and went on to become an original squadrista, taking part in the March on Rome. Having socialised among Rome’s avant-garde where intellectual Fascist ideas were mixed with those of anarchism and the radical left, he developed a prolific literary career studying the merits of Fascist art and culture before writing a history of Fascism. See Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Dizionario Biografico Degli Italiani Vol 51, Catanzaro, Arti Grafiche Abramo, pp.637-39.
education or entertainment, but above all as a method for the improvement and harmonisation of the body and morals to put oneself at the service of the motherland when and however it chooses to call.\textsuperscript{91}

Referring to the crisis of Italian sport that had corresponded with the nation’s poor military performance during World War I, the first editorial of the Bolognese \textit{La Voce Sportiva}, in 1924, established itself as a weekly in which Italian athletes would be both strongly defended and censured when necessary. Employing the Fascist sporting mantra of physical and moral strength, \textit{La Voce Sportiva} promoted a spirit of sacrifice that would contribute to the ‘good name of Italian sport, for its victory is each and everybody’s’.\textsuperscript{92} With the nation of primary importance, it astutely warned against the potential dangers of regionalism that emerged throughout the peninsula within ten years, as local city-based clubs intensified their rivalries. ‘Regionalism does not need to be, nor can it be, parochial and partisan: but only a source of spiritual emulation, a potent inspiration to greater things.’\textsuperscript{93}

In 1929, with the regime fully aware of the potential market and impact of sport, Arpinati’s \textit{Il Littoriale} took sports journalism beyond just nationalism and into the realms of political direction, by imploring its readers to support the Duce’s nominations for national representatives (former parliamentary deputies). With the usual sporting activities cancelled for the ‘elections’, the editorial asked fans to demonstrate their love for the country by contributing to the organic mass and affirming ‘national unity’ at that Sunday’s plebiscite.\textsuperscript{94}

Yet there was more to Fascist sport than simply promoting the regime and preparing individuals for potential wars to come, for the combination of physical and spiritual education with the synthesis of sport and culture was intended to create the ‘new man’ that Giovanni Gentile, among others, had been discussing for some time:

\begin{quote}
In the process of its continual formation, our body is our own script, the same that is said of will, intelligence, sensibility…spiritualisation; and in this sense the body is educable…the body is what we make it: and the more we spiritualise it the more we make it our own and revive it.\textsuperscript{95}
\end{quote}

According to Gentile, the combination of exercise, sacrifice and spiritual control would make the morally and physically able youth capable of resistance and self sacrifice during life in general, but particularly in times of war.\textsuperscript{96} Other commentators, such as Filippo Muzzi in \textit{Lo Sport Fascista}, extended the argument beyond the individual to suggest that sport could

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., p.1.
\textsuperscript{92} ‘Presentazione’, \textit{La Voce Sportiva}, 10/7/24, p.1.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., p.1.
\textsuperscript{95} Gallian, \textit{Arpinati}, p.190.
improve Italian life as a whole. Citing Piedmont and Lombardy as examples, he argued their strong athletic traditions were reflected not only in the well being of the population but also in a thicker web of communications, more schools, and more widespread norms of hygiene and civility among the masses.97

The mental and spiritual aspects of fitness had become as important as the physical, without which the latter was considered useless. As the novelist, playwright and arts critic Massimo Bontempelli identified: ‘sport is something more than simply physical education. The spirit of sport represents in itself a complexity, a balance, a harmonious blend of different forces.... The sporting spirit begins, first of all, where the competitive element and instinct, enters the field.’98

Contrasting with earlier class-based governments that stimulated competition among society, the Fascist regime wanted to arouse both the energies of the individual and the collective, thereby reflecting the new role of the state in areas of activity/society that had previously been left to the individual.99 As the journalist Ubaldo Grillo argued in *Il Littoriale*, maintaining or developing an interest in exercise and improved physical fitness among the entire adult population was intended to benefit the race as a whole.

The rebirth of our people coincides - and it could not be otherwise - with an exuberant flowering of every sporting manifestation. Sport, helped and encouraged, wisely imposed of course by the vigilant foresight of the Fascist Government, is winning over the strata of society most reluctant to the novelty and pace of life that characterise our times.100

The moral and physical education of this ‘strata’ included self-sacrifice, struggle and obedience to human and divine laws that would theoretically result in the emergence of a healthy man: the *Italiano nuovo*.101 As Leandro Arpinati later clarified when President of the FIGC:

Sport, in short, is understood not only just as athletics, as competition between champions, but as an indispensable physical education of the masses, an exercise that may do some good to the body and spirit.... for the physical improvement of the race, nothing is as useful as sport that teaches everybody an amount of discipline and moulds muscles with character.102

Not surprisingly, Gallian also supported this organic vision of sport for the nation: ‘to live with comfort in modern life, in the century of Mussolini, requires physical and mental

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102 ‘L’on. Arpinati per la razionalizzazione dello sport,’ *Il Resto*, 26/6/28, p.3.
training; it is necessary to prepare oneself for the adventures of tomorrow.'\textsuperscript{103} Yet, having seized power and the opportunity to educate and spiritualise the nation, the new Fascist government was unsure of the most effective way to achieve it. The ease and confidence with which its theorists had previously outlined various roles for sport disappeared. The party now faced the dilemma of whether to abolish the old organisations and substitute them with new ones, or to use the old organisations and provide them with a new spiritual content under PNF supervision.\textsuperscript{104}

**The Battle for Bodies**

The regime rejected outright a return to the methods of democratic Italy that were incapable of serving the new order as, according to *La Gazzetta*, sport needed to be ‘designed as an instrument for the Imperial education of the youngest Italians.’\textsuperscript{105} Rather than abolish those societies that pre-dated Fascism, the regime chose the more pragmatic option of restructuring them. Thereafter it imposed its own sense of spirit and discipline while developing their technical and political aspects. As noted by Augusto Parboni, one of Fascist Italy’s most prominent journalists, sport became a new method for penetrating and educating the masses both physically and spiritually, thereby helping the regime insert itself firmly into the life of the nation until it became indispensable.\textsuperscript{106}

To achieve this, Parboni identified four underlying principles behind the Fascist intervention in physical education:

1) The fusion of the classical Greco-Roman concept of physical education with the medieval element of warlike preparation.
2) To solve the problem of propaganda with the creation of large stadia (Littorale, PNF stadium, Milan Arena and the Mussolini stadium).
3) To penetrate the masses with the creation of numerous gymnasia and sports fields.
4) To no longer leave teaching in the hands of exponents of old style gymnastics, but to entrust it to the young who were strong and ready, not only physically.\textsuperscript{107}

The most obvious area for the regime to begin this process was in the field of state education, especially as the ‘new man’ was to embody the unification of culture,
knowledge and action. However, there was little substance upon which pre and post unification sport could have been based. Prior to the Risorgimento some societies had existed, but despite the pretext of gymnastics, patriotism was clearly more important than physical activity. It was an approach that post unification governments also followed, sport being tolerated as little more than a means for Italy to defend itself. Muscles were honed to produce fit soldiers rather than athletes, George Mosse observing how the statutes of each sport society or federation were designed to make ‘the young agile and strong, and thus more useful to themselves and to the homeland’. Consequently, one of Liberal Italy’s legacies to the Fascist era was an impoverished sporting culture and infrastructure, which left some parliamentary deputies, such as Ezio Gray of Novara, in fear of what little was being done to maintain and improve the nation’s position in the world.

Unfortunately, many parents did not concur with the merits of physical exercise and failed to encourage their children to participate, often providing them with medical certificates to exonerate them from activity. Vittorio Costa, the schools gymnastics inspector for the Commune of Bologna noting Arpinati’s recollection of schoolboy boredom with the old-style repetitive gymnastics that ‘they all followed like automatons, and was certainly more adept at containing nascent forces than developing them.’ He was supported by Lando Ferretti who, in one of his many books on the subject, also lamented how ‘the Italian school had closed its doors to physical education’.

A prolific public speaker, writer and journalist, Ferretti’s career included spells as co-director of La Gazzetta dello Sport, from 1919-24, and editor of Lo Secolo and Lo Sport Fascista. After participating in the March on Rome, he also became a member of the Fascist Grand Council, a Member of Parliament, an officer in the Militia and head of Mussolini’s press office from 1928-31. In this last role he extended the regime’s control over the press while becoming one of the principle synthesisers of sport and Fascist culture, reconciling them with politics in a manner that reflected the Duce’s own ideas. He was also the instigator of the first Fascist youth organisation and President of the Comitato Olimpico

109 Mosse, The Image of Man, p.162.
110 Ibid., p.39.
113 Ferretti, Il Libro dello Sport, p.69.
Nazionale Italiano (CONI) - the Italian Olympic Committee from 1925-28, the role in which he appointed Arpinati to oversee the FIGC’s restructure. As Lo Sport Fascista was proud to claim, its editor did not only appreciate sport’s prominent force in the modern world in general, but also its particular resonance for the national politics of the new Fascist state.

Arguing that Italy had been suffocated by German culture and philology, Ferretti questioned the achievements of the 1878 and 1909 laws, as exercise of the body was still deemed vain and all that was considered useful was ‘to study, study and study to pass exams’. He believed the situation was no better in the universities or among society in general, where those participating in sporting activity were considered carefree time wasters. Scorn was also poured upon university professors, particularly those who had not fought in the war and were consequently unable to understand the Fascist revolution. For this reason Ferretti raged against the profession that: ‘cursed sport...and...the new youth bursting onto the battlefield of Italian life, through the most authoritative, most heard and consequently most responsible voice: that of Benedetto Croce.’

His opinion reflected how many intellectuals saw only a negative and contradictory relationship between sport and culture; the former blooming as the sun set on the latter. Giovanni Papini da Bulciano, the Futurist co-founder of the influential review La Voce who later joined the Catholic fold, was another who believed Italy’s former greatness had always been founded in the preeminence of spiritual things. Thus he objected to the way that sport had resulted in the heroes of today no longer being “the great artists or even the conquerors...but the boxers...the “kings of the pedals” who have no other rivals in the favour of the millions”. Yet, in his 1915 collection of essays entitled ‘Maschilità’ (Masculinity), Papini argued that the ‘new man’ would be built on the somewhat contradictory foundations of discipline and spontaneity, both of which sport could develop. His ideas imparted serious influence on Fascist thought, with perhaps the most important being his organic theory that the combined majority of the population had an inseparable spiritual and physical power.

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115 1906-1914 CONI was known as the International Committee for the Olympic Games.
118 Ferretti, Il libro dello sport, pp.63-64.
119 Ferretti, Esempi e idee, p.191.
120 J. Schnapp, (ed.) A Primer of Italian Fascism, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2000, p.140.
121 Ferretti, Esempi e idee, pp.193-94.
However, many of those who criticised the old education system for woefully neglecting its responsibilities during the liberal era, were even less convinced of its ability to make a significant contribution to Fascist society. Giovanni Gentile saw a new Fascist intelligentsia emerging from a restructured education system that was both authoritarian and elitist, which would then use the state to impart national values upon the citizens.123 Two of his close associates were Ernesto Codignola and Balbino Giuliano who responded to the education system’s apparent inability to select, educate and develop strong enough nationalist sentiments among a new Fascist elite, by forming a splinter section of the fascio di educazione nazionale - national teachers association - soon after the conclusion of the war. They located the source of the problem in the expansion of higher school and university education. Not only had this integrated middle-class students with the petty bourgeois and working-class masses, but it had also reduced the institutions to ‘a machine for supplying diplomas and certificates to a horde of petty-bourgeois status seekers,’ precisely the sector of society that Codignola believed was ‘incapable of acquiring true culture’.124

Gentile became Mussolini’s first minister of public instruction in 1923, at the apogee of the crisis of physical education in schools. His response was an education act that year that Tracy Koon has argued ‘became the foundation upon which later ministers of education constructed the complex superstructure of school and party organizations aimed at socializing Italian youth’.125 The law introduced more militarism and extreme nationalism into the curriculum, plus tougher selection for secondary schools. Further restricting access to education and university entry, it reinforced traditional class distinctions in response to the Right’s fear that the 1859 Casati law had opened up higher education too much. As Lyttelton also suggests, Gentile’s reform drew a distinct line between elite education and popular instruction: ‘Free culture and the totalitarian State were not, for him, incompatible.... The reform of education was to encourage at the same time individual and national integration.’126 Quite simply, it was the breeding ground for the citizen-soldier.

While Mussolini endorsed the act as crucial for the creation of a Fascist ruling class, one party member decried it as ‘more reactionary than Fascist’, while Futurists opposed its exclusivity, demanding that education be made more practical with a greater emphasis on

123 de Grazia, The culture of consent, p.188.
124 Lyttelton, Seizure of Power, pp.404-5.
125 Koon, Believe, Obey, Fight, p.33.
industrial techniques and sport.\textsuperscript{127} Gentile’s reform also took the responsibility for providing physical education away from middle schools and gave it to the ENEF,\textsuperscript{128} which Patrizia Ferrara had described as a complete failure.\textsuperscript{129} Ending the state’s role within the teaching of gymnastics, it forced many of the system’s oldest and best teachers to retire while also failing to address the need for public gymasia.

Despite its faults, the drive to establish physical education in schools resulted in over 150 teachers in Bologna receiving rudimentary athletics training at the new Littoriale sports complex. In a series of eight, two-hour lessons, they were given theoretical instruction in general sport and physical education, followed by practical coaching from recognised athletes. Aware that two hours of gymnastic activity per week could only have a limited effect, staff were taught simple daily exercises that pupils could carry out each morning and evening.

To assess teaching standards and ensure the physical education programme was reaching its intended goals, all pupils took a test at the end of the third year, with prizes for the most successful. Consisting of a military-type exercise, a game, long jump and a run, the test catered for all abilities from the weakest to the strongest, with individuals set pass rates according to their ability. At the end of the school year, both boys and girls came together to compete in a week-long athletics competition staged in the Littoriale. By 1928, Bologna boasted over 15,000 graduates. Although new records were given as evidence of the scheme’s positive effect in Bologna, the regime still viewed individual exaltation suspiciously and praise was not only given to those successful children, but also to their families and the sporting infrastructure in general. While individual excellence was an important propaganda weapon in the regime’s armoury, no one person was bigger than the team, as \textit{Lo Sport Fascista} noted: ‘We certainly praise the little champions, but our minds need to rest above all on the mass of pupils, teachers, on the fathers and mothers of the family taken over by physical education, by sport and above all by athletics.’\textsuperscript{130}

Despite the positives aspects of participating in competitive sport, some critics were still concerned that it contained negative side-effects. Rumours circulated as to the moral and physical effect of sport upon the nation’s youth, while female participation continued to receive little encouragement. This was partly due to Church protests but also because of the

\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Ibid.}, p.407.
\textsuperscript{129} Ferrara, \textit{Ibid.}, p.219.
fear that it might lead to further calls for emancipation. As noted by Victoria de Grazia:
‘Ultimately, childbirth was the best exercise, of course.’ Such doubts even extended to a
minority of doctors who thought sport could impair the physical development of young
people, while others were concerned that the devotion of extra time and energies to physical
education might have a negative impact on a student’s general education. Despite such
claims, there was already a firm belief in the benefits of sport and recreation for the
population, so long as potentially harmful side-effects were monitored. Thus, to supplement
the attention given to athletes’ mental health, their physical well-being during events within
the Littorionale stadium was monitored by a team of doctors, who also pooled their knowledge
and skills to develop a new specialisation in sport science.

The Institute for Sports Medicine was another of Arpinati’s initiatives. Based at the
Littorionale, the physicians conducted research varying from anthropometrics and eugenics, to
more mainstream enquiries into biomechanics, biometrics and tests on the effects of
nutrition, tonics, stimulants and hormones. While by modern standards it may have
constituted a crude and invasive format, it was a cutting-edge centre of research that,
incidentally, had the full ‘cooperation of Italian and German-financed pharmaceutical firms
like Bayer’. Designed to specifically benefit the development of Italian athletes through
injury prevention and cure, the Institute’s anthropometric research was also praised for its
contribution to the advancement of general medical science that was protecting organic
society. In fact, the pursuit of excellence was not the doctors’ only role, as Il Littorionale made
clear: ‘the most important duty of the medic...not that of creating champions and
specialists, but it is raising the average physical development for the benefit of individuals,
but better still to the advantage of the collective.’ It was a distinction that Arpinati also
made, when head of CONI:

I repeat, it is necessary to distinguish the sporting aspect from that of the collective interests for the
improvement of the race. I need champions because the champion is the banner of sport, but I am also
interested in sport contributing to, indeed it might be the best factor, the improvement of the race.

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132 Ibid., p.12.
133 For more details see Società Sportiva di Bologna, (ed.) Il Littorionale, Bologna, Tipografia Paolo Neri, 1931,
pp.23-32.
134 ‘L’Arte medica nella educazione fisica e nello sport’, Lo Sport Fascista, 8, 1929, pp.17-18; ‘Sport and
136 ‘L’on. Arpinati per la razionalizzazione dello sport’, Il Resto, p.3.
The drive to improve the nation’s health through sports medicine extended throughout the peninsula. This was illustrated by the 1929 conference to defend the concept of sport and discuss injury prevention, convened by Arpinati at the Casa del Fascio in Bologna, which attracted participants from as far as Milan and Bari. Above all, this first conference was intended to pool the collective wisdom and enthusiasm of the medical profession from all over Italy. It was essentially a national networking opportunity that, according to *Il Resto*, officially encouraged doctors who ‘had been almost alienated from the sports field, to enter through the main gates, with all the weight of...[their]...authority and specific knowledge’.

In his opening address, Arpinati expressed how important he considered their intervention to be: ‘The impulse given by the Fascist Regime to the development of sport is the most wonderful thing, but it could also be dangerous if the doctors do not tell us where the limits of progress end and those of harm begin.’ Not surprisingly he was supported by key speaker Professor Giovanni Pini, who argued that medicine could no longer afford to isolate itself from the physical and moral athletic development of the coming generations, if Italian sport was to fully assist the physical regeneration of society. Despite the unquestionable foresight of investing in the nation’s sporting future, there was still a reverse side to the coin.

Although the medical research carried out in Bologna was intended to improve the safety and performance of individuals while contributing medical advances that would benefit the rest of society, it also ensured that the health of both amateur and elite athletes was brought firmly under the control of the regime. What had formerly been considered an essentially private issue, had now become public and a state responsibility. As David Horn states in his study of the social body that was Fascist society, such interventionist practices ‘redrew the boundaries between the public and the private that had characterized the liberal problematic. In the name of social defense and the promotion of the population, previously private behaviors were made targets of a permanent governmental management.’

The needs of collective society were further enhanced by the opening of a sports training institute for men in Rome, in 1928, which eventually gained university status in 1939. Students were selected from party members who had met strict selection criteria and passed aptitude tests, after which they undertook courses on mysticism and Fascist legislation.

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138 Ibid., p.1.
139 Ibid., p.1.
as part of their three years of teacher training. Boarding at the institute, they lived in six vast dormitories equipped for 200 students and benefited from a range of facilities that included a library, baths, barbers, plus medical and training facilities. Completely immersing the students in this world of Fascist education was designed to create sports teachers and ‘new men’ that would set the correct examples, encourage and educate society’s youth that, according to *Lo Sport Fascista*, would otherwise withdraw from sport if continually ignored:

> Abandoned to themselves, or worse still, badly guided, these youngsters waste precious energies in efforts unsuited to their physical means that ruins their physique. We need to teach them technique, to control their exertions in order to succeed and get the maximum benefit from the minimum effort. And here CONI includes in its utilisation program for the stadium [*Stadio Nazionale*] theoretical-practical courses for instructors.

Physical exercise and sport also strengthened the regime’s other campaigns against alcoholism, tuberculosis, malaria and infant mortality, which contributed to its pronatalist drive to breed fitter and more politically-malleable future generations. While there was initially a genuine belief that pronatalism could regenerate Italian society, it was also considered important not to ignore the existing elements, thereby making the best of the liberal era’s bad job. However, as pronatalism proved increasingly fruitless, the benefits of improving the health of the existing population assumed an increasing significance in the light of the fears that had originally stimulated the ‘battle for births’.

This was further augmented by the regime’s organic view of society as the sum of its individual parts, the needs of the former being prioritised over those of the latter. The result was the characterisation of society as either healthy or diseased, normal or pathological. According to Horn, this categorisation of society as a social body, which ‘like physiological bodies, could be cured, defended, and made objects of an ongoing prophylaxis,’ was part of a process in interwar Italy that was increasingly seen by Mussolini and others as “medical” art.

Social and medical sciences now had the responsibility for diagnosing, preventing and curing society’s ills.

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142 See Horn, *Social Bodies*.
Not only was this a break from the liberal prioritisation of the individual over that of the collective, it also made any personal physical or behavioural ‘defects’ a potential threat to the generic, social body. Thus, the reduction of the individual to one constituent part of the entire social organism had profound implications for personal freedoms and liberties. Alfredo Rocco, one of the founders of the Italian nationalist movement and Justice Minister from 1925-32, similarly interpreted the new role of the Fascist state as one in which social and national interests were pursued over those of the person. Yet this did not render individuals insignificant, as they were still subjects as opposed to merely objects and therefore able to impact upon the social body. Consequently, Rocco argued that state intervention in the health and welfare of the population was necessary to protect and develop the social body as a whole.  

While the early years of Fascist rule were characterised by repression, as the regime fought to establish and secure its position, by the mid-late 1920s this was reduced to more preventive work as part of the normalisation campaign. From this point onwards the regime became less interested in penalising crime, preferring instead to identify, anticipate, contain and prevent risks to the social body. In short, to protect society, the state awarded itself the right to take preventive action in areas that had previously been considered the private responsibility of the individual.

One such example was the introduction of social insurance that was arguably intended to protect society from its individual component parts. The 1927 Carta del Lavoro also removed the individual’s previously understood right to work and redefined it as a task that the state would assign. Welfare provision also changed from providing for individual needs to addressing those of society as a whole, a practice that Umberto Gabbi termed ‘political medicine’. While preventing social disease, this new attitude towards the protection of the organic being extended to improving the physical and hygienic condition of the future generations, thereby conforming to the new principle of prevention as opposed to cure. Paradoxically, given the state’s new invasive powers, personal responsibility for health and welfare was increased as illness or lack of fitness would prevent the individual from making a full contribution to the social body, be that quantified in terms of work, productivity or fertility. Although the state played its role in promoting and educating the population in good health and hygiene practices, personal welfare had become a social duty

146 See Lyttelton, Seizure of Power, pp.121-148.
of the individual. This prioritisation of the organic collective was often portrayed in the
successes of the Italian football teams that provided a perfect allegory in which individuals
were depersonalised and lost within the identity of the collective.

On 26 May 1927, Mussolini delivered his Ascension Day address\(^{148}\) in which he
assessed the physical health of the population and how it would be regenerated. Contrasting
sharply with the laissez faire ‘suicidal theory’ of prewar liberal governments, he argued that:
‘in a well-ordered State, taking care of the health of the people was of primary
importance.’\(^{149}\) As ‘the clinician’, he promised not to ‘neglect the symptoms’.\(^{150}\) His remarks
were indicative of a new paternalism in which Fascism would take the necessary hygienic
measures against the apparent degeneration of the national stock. Horn has also suggested
that this demographic campaign was in fact a reaction to a culturally assembled problem: ‘a
specifically modern construction of the demographic and medical needs of the biological
population that called into question the relations between the individual, the social, and the
political.’\(^{151}\) Essentially, through the demographic campaign in all its guises the regime could
revolutionise social relations between the individual and the state.

This is not to suggest there were not both genuine and imaginary concerns for
Mussolini regarding the national stock, particularly following the substantial losses during
the Great War and a massive 600,000 deaths from the flu epidemic of 1918.\(^{152}\) Undoubtedly
there was good reason to improve the health of those remaining citizens that had an integral
role in nation’s future, but unlike the northern European and Nazi eugenics policies that were
founded more on the importance of racial purification, it was quantity and quality rather than
racial purity that preoccupied the regime. Differing from the racial fundamentals of Nazism,
Italian Fascist ideology preferred the concept of national ‘stock’, which was reflected in its
population policy up until the introduction of the racial laws in 1938. In fact, Morel’s theory
of mixing the genetic gene pool to regenerate the race was arguably a stronger source of

\(^{147}\) Quoted in Horn, *Social Bodies*, p.44.


\(^{150}\) Susmel & Susmel, *Opera Omnia*, p.367.

\(^{151}\) Horn, *Social Bodies*, p.49.

\(^{152}\) Ibid., p.57.
Fascist inspiration. As the liberal social theorist Vilfredo Pareto suggested, a biological free-for-all could invigorate both the race and the political elites. Once again, the example of 1934 World Champion football team, which possessed no less than five players who were oriundi or first generation Italians from South America, provides interesting supporting evidence.

The declining birthright was a symptom of disease that Fascist doctors, social engineers and teachers were all charged with curing. Yet this was not peculiar to Italy, as there were considerable concerns about racial fitness, population decline and the impact of decadence throughout European society, most notably in France and Britain. As Morel identified, the principle cause of this was modernization and its resulting offspring of industrialisation and urbanisation. As people continued to move into expanding urban centres, disease, unemployment, and crime were the inevitable side effects that threatened the nation. Consequently, the regime was forced to look beyond pronatalism to regenerate society. If a positive birth rate could attend to the numerical problems, physical education, sport and the rebuilding of cities could strengthen its existing members. Moreover, while improving the physical and moral condition of society, such a policy also provided the regime with a tailor-made opportunity to control or interfere in a major part of the nation’s private life.

Although the successful examples of sports development in Bologna and at Farnesina contributed to the expansion of physical education in Italian schools, there were still considerable gaps in the albeit limited provision for children. It was hoped that youth groups and the ENEF would identify and make up this deficit, but the new body lacked the funds and facilities. Thus, on 3 April 1926, the growing number of groups were united and granted legal status under the auspices of the ONB. Its days clearly numbered, the ENEF was finally suppressed on 18 October 1928 as Balilla took complete responsibility for the physical education of the under eighteens.

Harnessing Hearts and Minds

Much to Starace’s chagrin, the ONB was more dependent upon the state than the party. Enthusiastically led by Renato Ricci who cared little for traditional hierarchies, he

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154 For further discussions on the politics of Ricci and the ONB see: P. Bartoli, C. Pasquini Romizi, R. Romizi, (eds) L’organizzazione del consenso nel regime fascista: l’Opera Nazionale Balilla come istituzione di controllo sociale, Perugia, Istituto di etnologia e antropologia culturale della Universita degli studi, 1983; C.
protected his fiefdom by trying to prevent national bodies outside of the ONB from using its sporting facilities. Yet, with forty-five case del Balilla built by 1933 and many more in progress, in addition to the construction of the Foro Mussolini (Italico), Ricci had a strong argument should Mussolini have wanted to reproach his deliberate isolation of the ONB from the main body of the party. Either way, the Duce was unable to permit the inevitable conflict that arose between schools, CONI and the various sports federations.

Ricci was also opposed to the ideology of campionismo (the primary importance of winning) among those under the age of 18, fearing the moral and physical damage the child might incur. However, the 1930s saw a shift in the regime’s thinking away from merely integrating the classes and mobilising the masses through the ONB. Fascism now demanded the production of champions whose achievements and victories would earn it cultural capital. It was at this point that Ricci’s vision became a lost cause.

Prior to this the ONB had been separated into Balilla (8-14 years), which focussed on general physical activity and Avanguardie (15-18) that concentrated on sports activities. Although both were established for recreational-hygienic and physiological purposes that reflected Ricci’s co-educational programme for the development of Italian youth, they also possessed a distinctly militaristic flavour. Between the ages of 18-21, young men joined the Fasci Giovanili di Combattimento (FFGGCC) - the premier youth group - where they could participate in the selection process to join the ranks of the PNF and the militia. The Balilla, Avanguardie and Fasci Giovanili became the three essential steps by which an individual could reach the threshold of the party, although membership was considered a reward that individuals had to earn, rather than a natural right of passage.

In 1928, the Carta dello Sport added a competitive element to sport and gave the ONB responsibility for organising physical education for all children aged 6-18. More than just physically educating Italian youth, sport became a key aspect of military training with army officers teaching athletes to be instructors, as sport was increasingly appropriated by the party. Adolescents over the age of 14 were permitted to enrol directly into CONI

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157 For the principal points of the Carta dello Sport see F. Fabrizio, Sport e Fascismo, pp.39-42.

organisations, but this was subject to their prior membership of the ONB. Balilla recruitment was carried out through schools, and membership reached 5.5 million by 1936, of which over 3.7 million were actively participating in physical exercise. When the Gioventù Italiana del Littorio (GIL) replaced the ONB in 1937 and expanded its age group from 6-21, its membership increased overnight to seven-and-a-half million. By forming the ONB and taking control of young people’s sporting activities, one of Fascism’s three initial sporting objectives was achieved.

**Playing Political Games**

Having seized the means of moulding the next generation, the regime turned its attention to adult society that was less malleable and, perhaps, more important to its immediate survival. While it may have been unrealistic to expect the regeneration of the entire adult population, the regime did attempt to make the best of what it had. If adult bodies were beyond redemption, their minds certainly were not. Giovanni Gentile was once again called upon to establish a framework to ensure their support, and in 1924 he formed the Istituto Fascista di Cultura (IFC) - National Fascist Institute of Culture - that attempted to establish some common aims between traditional academic culture and the activism of the new Fascist intelligentsia.

The IFC was reformed in 1929 by Alessandro Pavolini and moved to Florence where he was Podestà. Although it did not change dramatically in its aims, the body’s work was redirected towards the masses, as demonstrated by Article 2 of its new constitution. This defined the Institute’s role as boosting and diffusing culture ‘among every social stratum, with particular regard to the middle and popular classes’. To achieve this, the IFC established study centres, conferences, courses, libraries and exhibitions, in addition to promoting almost any other cultural activity. However, as Victoria de Grazia has observed, the majority of lower social classes were ‘incapable of “directly assimilating doctrine”. This forced Fascism to attack its two remaining goals of gaining control over recreational sport associations for industrial workers, plus sports societies affiliated to national sports federations.

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159 'Il testo della Carta dello Sport', *Lo Sport Fascista*, 1, 1929, p.5.
161 ‘La costituzione dell’Istituto Fascista di Cultura’, *La Nazione*, 16/1/29, p.4.
162 de Grazia, *The culture of consent*, p.188.
In 1925, following poor international results, CONI was made responsible for producing a sporting elite worthy of representing the regime in international competition, while another commission of experts was assembled to consider how Fascism could best diffuse the practice of physical education in Italy. The solution to both problems was the expansion of sport among the masses. The various federations were compelled to join CONI, Lando Ferretti's appointment as CONI chairman symbolising the beginning of its complete loss of autonomy. By the following year it was a virtual arm of the party that could appoint executives to the various federations and had imposed the fasces on the badges of all members. Thereafter, according to La Nazione, CONI oversaw the 'discipline and co-ordination of the various sporting activities from the political and benevolent point of view'.

Although the Olympic Committee's achievements were assessed by the performance of Italian teams in international competition, it was also expected to secure a more prominent Italian presence in the various European governing bodies that tended to be dominated by the French. With over fourteen of the thirty international sporting bodies based in France, Italian sport had something of an inferiority complex. Only Alberto Bonacossa, head of the International Federation of Motorcycle Clubs, was in a position of influence, although even his office was based in England. This desire to extend Italian influence was intended to achieve positive results as much as good publicity for the regime. As Guido Beer, Secretary of the Council of Ministers, explained in a Pro-Memoria in 1928, it was hoped that an increased Italian presence in the international governing bodies could bend the allegedly corruptible system in Italy's favour:

It is necessary to send influential people abroad...to substitute them for people absolutely unknown outside of Italy. Too often we believe we have been victims of organised juries, when instead, we have almost always been victims of our own meagre moral and material preparation. It is necessary to intervene at the congresses, to know the men that compose the international bodies, to have our representatives in all the bodies of the big competitions, because it is too evident that when results are even, the judges always side with the colours of their own nation.

A national sports office maintained links between CONI and the party, while provincial party secretaries ensured that the Enti Sportivi Provinciali Fascisti (ESPF) - local sports organisations - were equally well co-ordinated. It was their role to oversee provincial sport and take direct control, when necessary, of those activities that were considered

163 Commissione Reale per lo studio di un progetto relativo all'ordinamento dell'educazione fisica, see Ferrara, Italia in palestra, p.223.
important but lacked the necessary financial and material resources to develop. With this brief, the work of the ESPF was divided into four main areas: politics, propaganda, organisation, and finance.\textsuperscript{166}

Politically, the ESPF was responsible for the creation, fusion and dissolution of sports clubs. Thus, aspiring societies had to demonstrate how their activities conformed to the new Fascist legislation, that being how they contributed to the development of the new national spirit. The ESPF helped diffuse this spirit through its propaganda work that encouraged municipalities to establish sports facilities and societies. This was especially important in the south where poverty continued to undermine their development. Popular and healthy sports that had been neglected in the past were generally helped, subsidised and taken directly to the masses, athletics being one in which the party was proud of its intervention and results. It also reorganised existing events, such as the Mille Miglia car rally, which Parboni used as an example to declare that wherever sports events took on a popular, local character, they would receive the help and collaboration of the party to improve them.\textsuperscript{167}

Despite his claim, the ESPF were dissolved in 1930 due to their failure as organs of propaganda. Their responsibilities were placed directly in the hands of the party’s provincial federal secretaries. As the ultimate sporting and political authorities in their provinces, they were theoretically free to bypass unnecessary bureaucracy and better serve the development of sport.\textsuperscript{168} Of course, the reality of this measure was a further centralisation of sport in the regions.

In a circular informing the various secretaries of the changes, Turati emphasised two principal areas in which they needed to concentrate their work: financing the poorest, most popular and most useful sporting activities, plus the political control of the directors of societies and agencies active in propaganda.\textsuperscript{169} In this way, the control and future of sport throughout Italy was brought firmly under the auspices of the party, as Carlo Levi lamented:

\begin{quote}
Sport is no longer considered a free activity but a political interest, its value moved away from the sporting human being to the mechanical result, considered a value in itself. In the interior of a particular sport a hierarchy develops, an association of governors and servants: sport takes on the moral nature that characterises the regime.\textsuperscript{170}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{165} Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), PCM 1928-30, f.3.2.5. n.4301, 'Pro-Memoria', 15/9/28, pp.3-4.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., p.695.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., p.697.
\textsuperscript{170} Bianchi, 'Sport (Dall'Italia)', Giustizia e Libertà, p.48.
Prior to its dissolution, the ESPF's propaganda work was supported by that of the
Dopolavoro, which the regime hoped would structure the common man's leisure-time and
recreation. Although its work was different to that of CONI, the OND still shared a common
interest in the development of sport for the masses. By encouraging corporate paternalism
and the establishment of company sports and social clubs, it was hoped that workers could be
couraged away from rival socialist and catholic organisations. In many respects, the OND
embodied the socialist fear of organised sport and leisure as a distraction from the class
struggle. Yet, somewhat ironically, its structure resembled the earlier suggestions of left-
wing thinkers who argued that the working class could be socialised and slowly politicised
through just such an organisation, which only served to further underline the Socialist Party's
missed opportunity.

Although there was little debate about the exact role of the OND prior to the 1928
Carta dello Sport, the new legislation gave it a firm direction that eliminated the conflicting
ideas around physical education and sport that had impeded its work. Thereafter, physical
education was directed towards making the mass of young people healthy while educating
the social body to strengthen itself. Sport, on the other hand, was for athletes contesting
primacy, the struggle for life among men who had been blessed with the best physiques, will
and ability to sacrifice themselves to training. These distinctions defined the respective roles
of CONI and the OND; the former concentrating solely on competitive sport, with the latter
on sport, among other things, as a mass popular leisure time activity.

As Ferretti further clarified: the concept 'that inspires the sporting activity of the
Dopolavoro is not that of creating champions, but of offering the masses physically and
morally healthy recreation after long hours of work'. Contemporaries were soon able to
observe the ONB and OND spreading and diffusing the passion for sport on a mass basis.
According to one contributor to CONI's 1930 annual publication, this was uniting and
reawakening the national spirit to produce athletes who would truly represent the entire
nation while showing the world its future. In reality, champions were unlikely to emerge
from the OND because, in general, the masses had not been blessed with the skills and talents
of top sportsmen, but this in itself was deemed neither a problem nor a reason not to promote
sport among all of society. As noted in a memorandum from the Secretary of the Presidency

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171 L. Ferretti, 'Il Fascismo e l'educazione sportiva della nazione', La Civiltà, p.611.
of the Council of Ministers, it was necessary to distinguish between physical education and Olympism:

Physical education lifts the masses, it creates champions from which Olympic super-athletes will come selected....

The sporting strength of a nation is given especially by the mass of good athletes, not by the number of Olympic victories.\(^\text{173}\)

The lottery of life had forced the masses to work for a living and restricted their participation at the top level to that of spectators. However, this in itself attained a greater significance in the eyes of the regime that hoped spectating might distract them from the increasing social, political and economic problems the nation was facing. Despite their sporting limitations, the OND nonetheless tried to instil personal pride among the masses by helping them explore their own abilities in a given field, thereby confirming the validity of their participation.\(^\text{174}\) According to Fantani, the Dopolavoro was also an equally important institution for the nation, as leisure-time sport and recreation enabled the individual to rest physically and mentally, which would help them attain their maximum productivity in the workplace.\(^\text{175}\) Above all, as *La Nazione* pointed out, the OND was one organ in the body of institutions designed to promote a love of sport among society that would help improve the nation's physical condition.\(^\text{176}\)

Once workers had been recruited into the OND it was hoped, in contrast to the IFC, that it would impart simple and accessible doctrinal information supplemented by general ideas of Fascist culture, which often contained a dominant nationalist theme with negative images of liberal democracies abroad. Despite the anti-war Kellog-Briand Pact, Europe's great powers were rearming and the continent was increasingly unstable. With this in mind, Parboni praised the militaristic virtues of the OND's work in raising the masses to the regime's minimum standard of moral and combative fitness.\(^\text{177}\)

While nationalist ideas were both easy to convey and comprehend, the OND was not specifically intended to develop a strong political consciousness. In fact, it kept traditional ideas of 'political' education to a minimum, preferring a 'moral education' or 'elevation'.\(^\text{178}\) Moreover, the OND studiously avoided any strict monopolisation of leisure-time, with many clubs, cafes, meeting places and organisations continuing to exist outside of its aegis.

\(^{173}\) ACS, PCM 1928-30, f.3.2.5. n.4301, 'Pro-memoria', 15/9/28, p.1.
\(^{177}\) 'Nel “Dopolavoro” riorganizzato', *Lo Sport Fascista*, p.8.
Nonetheless, it unquestionably enabled the regime to take more control over the free time of workers and students, while establishing a Fascist hierarchical organisation among sporting and recreational associations. Echoing Gramsci, Levi noted how sport had become a double-edged sword for the government to wield: ‘a release on one hand and a method of control on the other.’

Companies that were initially restricted to within the industrial triangle were slow to appreciate the potential benefits of establishing OND groups and the initiative was soon taken over by the Fascist trade unions. Membership began to expand following the introduction of the eight-hour day in the industrial sector and in 1927-8 it actively began recruiting within the countryside and among emigrant communities abroad. Although it penetrated the countryside to a certain degree, the OND was more successful in the cities, among the growing urban population. Reflecting upon the Dopolavoro’s achievements in Florence ten years after the revolution, the local sports weekly *Lo Stadio* hailed it as a categorical success for the physical development of local workers, among whom it had apparently established ‘a fervour, absolutely without precedent, in favour of every type of sport’.

Even if this were true, the failure to achieve the same level of success throughout Italy contradicted those who suggested that the OND had contributed to the development of an organic sense of nation. In reality, it had not only failed to mask society’s inequalities, but it had also reinforced and even highlighted class differences in some cases. Moreover, it was the working and lower middle classes that took most advantage of the facilities and opportunities on offer, as the bourgeois, landed and professional members of society continued to practise elitist sports such as hunting, tennis and golf.

The restructured system did ensure that almost all Italian citizens of all ages were able to practise some form of physical activity from school into adulthood, if they wished. With Mussolini portrayed as the number one sportsman in the press to stress the importance of moral and physical personal development, ONB and OND membership rose to over seven million within five years. In short, such organisations had seized the initiative and moulded sport into a modern, mass phenomenon. According to Parboni, the regime realised

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179 Bianchi, ‘Sport (Dall'Italia)’, *Giustizia e Libertà*, p.49.
182 Teja, ‘Italian sport and international relations under fascism’, *Sport and International Politics* p.165.
that sport could invigorate physical energies and stimulate economic productivity, while improving the morality and spirituality of the Italian people.\(^{183}\)

While invigorating Fascist society, sport also offered the regime another opportunity to interfere in the social politics of the nation, through science, art, medicine and hygiene. The social function of the Fascist state was to invest in all areas of the individual's life - because they were themselves considered a part of the state - supervising and protecting them from conception into adulthood. Consequently, Fascism needed to enter all agencies involved in the physical education of Italian youth. Naturally this included the *Gruppo Universitario Fascista* (GUF) - Fascist University Group - ONB, OND, sports federations, schools and CONI, as its organic vision of society demanded it develop the individual in all stages of life. This commitment ranged from training teachers and building stadia, to educating the young and adults in military discipline and the joy of physical exercise, all of which Parboni believed would help them confront their responsibilities.\(^{184}\)

A long and costly commitment, it was hoped the relationship between the various organisations connected with physical education would ensure the development of the type of Fascist citizens that Ferretti extolled in 1935: 'From the formation of the *giovanili*, universities, sporting societies to the Dopolavoro, the Party has forged a force of virile Italians from technique and physical exercise, which had been protected and wrapped in a passive ideal for too long.'\(^{185}\) As he explained, this new generation was now expected to publicise the regime's achievements by creating 'champions that will give prestige to the nation in international competition'.\(^{186}\) Thus, if the regime was to gain the maximum benefit while meeting Mussolini's demand that sport become firmly identified with Fascism, it had no choice but to give it the utmost attention. No longer a frivolous pastime, sport had become a necessity that signified the nation's new-found fortune, spirit and rising status.\(^{187}\) More than simply athletic endeavour, sporting trials of strength and technique against other competitors had become a true 'battle of the races'\(^{188}\) in which Fascist Italy needed to be victorious on every occasion.

As Ferretti told the young generation that was charged with defending and promoting the regime's honour in muscle, energy, spirit and thought, 'sport for us is an instrument of

\(^{185}\) Ferretti, 'Guerra e Sport', *Lo Sport Fascista*, p. 7.
\(^{188}\) A. Cotronei, 'La battaglia delle razze', *La Gazzetta*, 7/7/24, p.1
propaganda and authority of the nation'. It was a regularly repeated message throughout Italy, as seen in an article on Florentine football published in the commune’s monthly magazine in 1934: ‘You youngsters have been given the honour of representing Mussolini’s Italy in the sporting arena. In this name and with this task is your dignity. Sport demands seriousness, sacrifice, responsibility, exemplary physical and moral conduct.\textsuperscript{189}

As representatives of Mussolini’s Italy, the political loyalty of all sportsmen naturally had to be beyond question, but by 1926 this still did not appear to be the case. While the regime’s political opponents were excluded from the various sports federations and thus denied the opportunity to compete, there was still concern that not all of those sportsmen who claimed to be Fascist actually were. As the journalist Adolfo Cotronei argued in \textit{La Gazzetta}, there were still ‘cheats, greedy and shady characters’ within sport, from which the regime and the nation needed to free themselves. Only once these were ‘liquidated’ could Fascism hope to form a secure national force, ‘a militia armed only with fortified hearts’.\textsuperscript{190}

Following improved results at the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics it was not possible to doubt the impact of the regime’s contribution to sport and the international importance it placed on victory and success, however they were defined. These achievements also drew considerable comment from the foreign press that \textit{La Gazzetta}, in particular, was always keen to publicise domestically. One such example was a long article on the development of Italian sport and the recent successes of Italian athletes that was apparently published in the Hungarian \textit{Magyar Hirlop} in 1934: “It is marvellous to realise...the extraordinary development of Italian sport. The young are stimulated by the example of the leaders who willingly restrict themselves to a severe mode of life, just to get what is the ambition of every Italian today: the acclaim of the Duce”.\textsuperscript{191}

In his 1934 essay, Carlo Levi gave perhaps one of the most eloquent descriptions of the manner and extent to which sport had been consumed by the needs of the regime. Levi had no ideological objection to the masses’ passion for sport, even seeing it as a potentially dynamic force if it were left alone, but this had clearly not been the case. Appreciating the stealthy methods by which the government had come to assert its will over the people’s passion, he felt compelled to attack it in its Fascist format:

\begin{quote}
The action of the government, even indirectly, first causes this excessive passion for sport, it then returns to intervene, this time directly, by turning it to its needs and reducing it to a vain and non
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{189} ‘Il CONI e la sua opera’, \textit{Lo Sport Fascista}, 9, 1928, p.4.
\textsuperscript{190} ‘L’Associazione Fiorentina del Calcio’, \textit{Firenze: Rassegna del Comune}, June 1934, p.188.
dangerous hero-worship. That is, it grants the people enough entertainment to distract them from less innocent concerns, but it prevents them from developing an autonomous, uncontrolled sporting activity. At the same time it is used as a controlled activity for the purposes of the government, police, propaganda and prestige.  

Thus, as the relationship between Fascism and sport intensified, so the various teams were increasingly seen more as representatives of the regime than the nation. 'When Italy is playing, the new, sporting Italians are always members of the Fascist squads, even in foreign fields.' Gallian's statement in 1928, was also an early indication of the increasing militarisation of the sporting lexicon that was employed among the highest echelons of the PNF, such as party secretary Augusto Turati:

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

The net effect was twofold. Diplomatically, representative teams faced increasing anti-Fascist activity when competing abroad, especially as Italian foreign relations began to deteriorate. On the domestic front, victory became increasingly important for the regime, as noted by one Lo Sport Fascista contributor who described how the young were 'carrying in their hearts, the hopes and fears of everybody, the support and applause of the government that knows how to domestically organise and incite'.  

Yet, as Arnd Kruger has pointed out, if we are to justifiably refer to the domestic and diplomatic image of elite sport as a form of national representation, it is necessary to look for concrete events that demonstrate how 'there was not only talk about national representation through sports, but also action'. In Italy there was clearly both talk and action as sport quickly came to represent the regime and the nation in a variety of ways, one of the most visible being the construction of facilities. Leaders throughout the peninsula were encouraged to build the infrastructure that was gravely lacking. Almost overnight, stadia, swimming pools and gymnasia rose to form exciting new features of urban and rural life that provided organisations such as the ONB and OND with the necessary means to fulfil their roles. As

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194 Gallian, Arpinati Politico e Uomo di Sport, p.61.
196 'Educazione fisica e Fascismo', Lo Sport Fascista, 4, 1931, p.57.
Fantani said, they were the tools with which Mussolini was fighting the maladies of increasing urbanisation.198

However, the greatest and arguably most enduring impact of the new stadia was their symbolic representation of the drive to regenerate society through exercise. As the Under-secretary of State, Giacomo Suardo, told all Prefects in 1927, they would comply with ‘the government’s constant effort to make the new Italian youth, through daily exercise, physically and morally prepared to take on the jobs that await them’.199 The following year, in a circular to leading sporting figures within government and society, Turati further explained how such sports grounds needed to contain everything required for all of those activities ‘arranged by youth groups, schools, Dopolavoro, Balilla, avanguardisti, etc thus favouring the spread of sport among the youngest part of the nation’.200

While the Littoriale and the Giovanni Berta in Florence were the regime’s show piece stadia, they were also intended to inspire the Italian society that had been promised a sports field in every commune ‘that might be easy and inexpensive to build’.201 Their scale was such that they made an immediate impact upon local identities and while many were designed to accommodate a variety of events, their primary function was as venues for the increasingly popular mass spectator sport of calcio. These stadia gained even greater national prominence in 1929, when teams from the major Italian cities began competing in a single national league for the first time. The organisational change was part of a continuing process following the regime’s intervention and subsequent take-over of calcio in 1926, which had been specifically designed to bring order to the game, improve the national team and mobilise the masses while developing a sense of Italian national identity throughout the peninsula.

As will be seen, the Fascist takeover of calcio was generally considered to have been successful, improving standards at all levels, while contributing to the development of a culture of physical fitness among the population. In fact, it was so successful that it began to undermine its contribution to the development of national identity, by intensifying the local identities that were a by-product of city based clubs competing in the national league. It was one of the many contradictions exposed by calcio that Fascism failed to adequately resolve.

199 ACS, PCM 1928-30, f.3.2.5. n.2294, ‘Campi Sportivi del Littorio’, 6/9/27. For the numerous responses from communes throughout the peninsula see folder ‘Istituzione dei Campi Sportivi del Littorio’.
200 ACS, PCM 1928-30, f.3.2.5. n.3344, circolare n.19, 18/8/27.
201 P.N.F., Campo sportivo del Littorio, Roma, Libreria del Littorio, 1928, p.6. see also ‘Ogni comune deve avere il proprio campo sportivo’, La Nazione, 18/12/29, p.5.
Although this indicated the regime’s problems when trying to exploit football to create a sense of national identity, its success should not be underestimated either; as following the restructure of the game calcio took the regime to the pinnacle of international sporting achievement.
3. Fascist Football Foundations

Sport is that fatal art that gave the ultimate strike against the old conservative and backward mentality: if pure fascism exists today, it has its triumph in the gymnasia and the stadia.¹

By the mid-1920s football had become a national institution to which the regime needed to dedicate serious attention. Despite its original disinterest in competitive sport, the sheer weight of numbers involved in calcio, either as players, spectators, or merely followers of the expanding sport-specific press, demanded that the regime look closely at the organisation of the game and the Italian sporting infrastructure as a whole. Although there were other sports besides calcio, the journalist Filippo Muzzi declared the game: ‘a calling card that will help the understanding of other sports that do not have the sympathy of the crowd.’²

The desire to culturally and politically modernise Italy into a truly united nation prompted the regime’s restructuring of calcio, in 1926, after which, the game symbolised its new-found confidence, stability and desire to forge a new Fascist identity among the masses. The intervention came as Augusto Turati took over as the PNF secretary, which Jeffrey Schnapp has suggested signified a ‘decisive shift away from the unruly squadrism…[of]…his predecessor Farinacci…and introduced in its place a move towards party discipline, hierarchy, and coordination from the center’.³ As will be seen, the Fascist take over of the game and its administration during the following decade very much reflected this shift towards centralisation, hierarchy and discipline.

Calcio-chaos: The road to Viareggio

Formed in 1898, calcio’s original governing body, the Federazione Italiana del Football (FIF) became the Federazione Italiana Giuoco del Calcio in 1909. As in much of post 1918 Europe the Italian game experienced a massive growth in popularity; the 67 clubs competing for the title in 1919 increasing to 88 within two years.⁴ This expansion made the FIGC’s organisation of the league a massive task and sparked calls for structural reform from the biggest clubs that wanted a smaller, elite championship and greater voting rights in the Federation. However, the more the championship expanded the more power the smaller clubs

¹ Gallian, Arpinati, p.29.
³ Schnapp, Staging Fascism, p.45.
the L.25 fare plus the entry fee. Arguing the club should have helped fans attend the match by offering them half-price tickets, the paper suggested that an investment of L.2-3,000 would have resulted in over 400 supporters going to Verona to counter the intimidating cries of the locals. The following year ‘thanks to the interest of Leandro Arpinati’, according Il Resto del Carlino, a special train service discounted by 50 per cent was organised for the Lega Nord final in Turin. Indicating the team’s growing status and cross-regional support in Emilia-Romagna, it stopped in Modena, Reggio, Parma and Piacenza to collect a huge number of fans whose ‘enthusiastic and passionate support will be truly impressive and will be testimony to the discipline and strength of our glorious club.’

As these burgeoning crowds began to impact upon the control and outcome of matches, refereeing standards became one of the most contentious issues of the day. Confronted with hostile and disruptive interventions from players, fans and officials, the ability of referees to control matches came into question for the first time. In 1925, the third Lega Nord play-off match, between Genoa and Bologna, demonstrated the extreme pressure to which they were increasingly subjected. Leading 2-1 with only two minutes remaining, a shot from Bologna’s Muzioli was deemed by the referee, Giovanni Mauro, to have been saved by the goalkeeper and a corner kick awarded to Bologna. Although widely considered to have been the best referee in Italy at the time, Mauro was far away from the incident in question, which intensified the Bologna fans’ conviction that the ball had crossed the line for a goal. Among those supporters was the leader of the Bolognese Fascist Federation and future mayor, Leandro Arpinati, who, apparently, led a pitch invasion with his squadristi that culminated in shouting, pushing, threats and some skirmishes. Choosing personal safety over conscience, Mauro reversed his decision and awarded a goal. He also asked the Genoa captain, De Vecchi, to control his players on the understanding that he would invoke FIGC rule 50 pertaining to dangerous circumstances, which De Vecchi interpreted as meaning that Mauro would recognise the legitimate 2-1 scoreline as final. The match continued purely to avoid further trouble and with no more goals the Genoa players assumed they had won both

11 Ibid., p.1.
12 ‘Treno speciale per il match Juventus-Bologna’, Il Resto del Carlino, 22/7/26, p.2.
13 ‘Treno Ross-Blu’, La Vita Sportiva, 30/7/26, p.3.
16 ‘Verso il Girone Unico’, La Grande Storia del Calcio Italiano, 4, 20/2/65, p.89
the tie and the championship. However, Mauro recognised the 2-2 scoreline and ordered extra-time. The Genoa players refused, Bologna claimed the title and chaos ensued.

The Bolognese press was quick to reinforce the legitimacy of its team’s victory, *La Voce Sportiva* claiming that the team had won the championship: ‘on the pitch and by a unanimous plebiscite of the public.’

Members of Italian football’s aristocracy attending the game were also quoted as having concurred that the goal was indeed just, although one post match interviewee, without questioning its legitimacy, agreed that the decision had been made due to the pressure of the crowd. However, the suggestion that the crowd had pressurised the referee was rejected on the basis that the match had been played on a neutral ground, although the development of football tourism clearly made this possible. Having already appreciated the advantages of vocal, travelling support, it was no surprise that Bologna FC had subsidised thousands of supporters to make the journey to Milan in special trains.

In a final act of outright parochial provocation, *La Voce Sportiva* patronisingly excused the Genoa fans for their understandable anger, but it could not ‘approve the un-sporting gestures’. The Bolognese press’ decision to award its team the championship was presumptuous; perhaps deliberately so in an attempt to sway the awaited verdict of the Lega Nord. Apparently following a further intervention from the Bolognese Fascists, Mauro chose simply to recommend that the match was declared null and void and a fourth game convened to decide the title. It was an arrangement that suited the empty FIGC coffers, if neither of the clubs. Not only had Bologna FC been denied the title, *La Vita Sportiva* claimed the decision had also created: ‘a disagreeable and un-sporting precedent that could be repeated tomorrow by people who intend to use the complaints process as an indispensable weapon to satisfy their ardent partisanship, more than the legality of the battle on the field of play.’

Against this background of complex issues that the FIGC was struggling to contain let alone resolve, the ultimate crisis erupted after the Casale-Torino match on 7 February 1926. Almost replicating the Genoa-Bologna incident the previous year the referee, Sanguinetti, failed to award Torino a goal when the players were convinced they had scored.

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21 'Verso il Girone Unico', *La Grande Storia del Calcio*, p.89.
22 'Seguendo la nostra strada', *La Vita Sportiva*, 17/6/26, p.1.
Once again La Gazzetta’s account questioned if anybody could possibly have determined the
truth with any degree of certainty.\textsuperscript{23} Nevertheless, Torino believed that Sanguinetti was
responsible for their defeat and the result was referred to the Council of the Lega Nord. After
considerable deliberation and following ratification from the Federal Council, the league
anulled the match on the basis that Sanguinetti’s control had lacked the necessary ‘perfect
serenity of spirit’.\textsuperscript{24} Given the continuing splits between the clubs in league, any majority
decision was unlikely. Moreover, the two-and-a-half-month delay cast further doubt on the
wisdom and efficacy of the Lega’s competence to manage the game’s future, thereby
worsening the situation. As La Gazzetta noted: ‘When you want to cleanse the football world
of the germs of indiscipline and intolerance that are the most serious threats, you need to rid
the field of protests and cases that infuriate. Resolved three months ago, the Casale-Torino
complaint would already have been forgotten.’\textsuperscript{25}

This all undermined the committee’s decision regarding Sanguinetti’s conduct, La
Gazzetta questioning what exactly constituted ‘a match that was not directed by the referee in
the perfect serenity of spirit’ and the reason for such linguistic ambiguity.\textsuperscript{26} Whereas
referees’ authority had previously been unquestionable, this incident brought the conduct of
all into the spotlight. Not only an ambiguous statement that contributed more to conjecture
than clarity, the Lega’s decision was deemed to have lacked legitimacy and raised questions
about its ‘real’ motivation.\textsuperscript{27} Besides the issue of Sanguinetti’s dignity there was also the
wounded party of the Casale FC, which was supported by newspaper reports that only further
undermined the Lega’s credibility. Having won the initial, disputed encounter, La Gazzetta
encouraged Casale to win once again for the good of sport and to show all sports fans in Italy
that the match was ‘a contrast of strengths and not the epilogue to a painful episode…. It is in
difficult times that the poise of the club, the reason of its directors and the moral health of its
players manifest themselves.’\textsuperscript{28}

Ultimately, Casale was denied the opportunity to rectify the wrong after the ire of the
fans was increased by the decision to play the match behind closed doors. Fearing this would
only inflame the situation further the authorities vetoed it completely, La Gazzetta somewhat
ironically recording a small crowd that had gathered outside the ground to generously applaud the arrival of the Torino team.\(^{29}\)

Responding to the continuing publicity surrounding the Sanguinetti case and the Commission of Thirteen’s earlier decision that entitled clubs to reject up to eight per cent of the nominated list of referees, the AIA chose to stoutly defend its member.\(^{30}\) A Council meeting of the Association on 30 May 1926, convened to discuss the status of referees in general but with direct reference to the Sanguinetti case, concluded that the lack of any clear censure of his conduct had resulted in a vague formula that authorised almost anything. Most importantly, it had undermined the position of referees as a whole.\(^{31}\) In the light of this affront to the dignity and authority of its members, the AIA asked them to return their identity cards to the Sports Commission. Renouncing the body that was no longer protecting them or the written laws of the game, the AIA had effectively proclaimed a strike.

While many sympathised with the referees, there was considerable concern regarding the effect of this course of action upon the national game. What had originated as a number of loosely connected issues relating to the management of football had now developed into a crisis that threatened the notion and nature of the national game. So grave was the situation that *La Gazzetta* demanded a solution to the problem at all costs: ‘in honour of the flag, the athletes and the crowds, the championship needs to restart next Sunday.’\(^{32}\) Its plea was fortified by *La Vita Sportiva* that demanded central government intervene to force a solution to the crisis.\(^{33}\) With the FIGC’s inefficient, bureaucratic system unable to take the speedy or decisive action that was necessary, there was quite simply, *calcio*-chaos.

The championship had also become a protracted season that only highlighted the stark division between the wealthy and the poor clubs, both of which suffered in their own ways. A wealthy minority capable of winning the title had emerged but the demands placed upon them had also become more exacting as the supporters demanded stronger squads that required more money to attract the best players. Unfortunately, many games had become unattractive miss-matches between the rich and poor, the real business of the season commencing only once the play-off positions had been decided. Unable to break into the league’s elite due to their financial limitations, the poorer teams were left with little to fight for other than survival.

\(^{29}\) *Le vicende del mancato incontro Casale – Torino*, *La Gazzetta*, 31/5/26, p.2
\(^{31}\) ‘L’A.I.A. invita I propri soci a restituire la tessera’, *La Gazzetta*, 31/5/26, p.5.
It was a problem that Bruno Roghi believed to be surmountable, but not without a certain degree of pain. Although it may have been possible to delay the game’s restructuring, change had become inevitable and essential if calcio was to be saved. Key to Roghi’s recipe for success was a championship that placed teams in smaller divisions, to reflect and strengthen their technical abilities: ‘It does not only provide a champion resulting from exciting, close, sold-out matches, but it is also the basis for a thriving coexistence among all the Italian clubs and the stimulus to break the current deadlock.’

With the league reduced in size, teams could be more rigorously selected and matched according to their ability, while those clubs that were relegated or found themselves in lower divisions would benefit from a more appropriate level from which they could launch a more prosperous future. Complemented by a variety of other competitions, such as a knockout cup, local and regional tournaments, inter-city and international matches, Roghi anticipated that attendances would also increase, to the benefit of all. Above all, he believed the reduced championship would stimulate not only increased levels of discipline but also mutual respect and loyalty among the clubs, thereby resulting in a victory for the game as a whole.

There were alternatives to Roghi’s suggestion, one of which proposed that league football should revert back to a more regional basis because of poor facilities. Yet, whatever the solution, there was notable concern that any changes might intensify local rivalries. Even the game’s biggest supporter, La Gazzetta dello Sport, categorised it as: ‘a drug that arouses passions accordingly as the distance in kilometres between the two teams is reduced.’ The newspaper had identified the inevitable consequence of the national development of calcio. Whether the championship was structured on a specifically regional basis or as an all-embracing national competition, it was impossible to neuter the passionate game that thrived on local rivalries or campanilismo.

If the crisis was a chance for referees to improve their lot and newspapers to improve their sales, the regime also seized the opportunity to intervene in a national institution. On the announcement of the referees’ strike the CONI President, Lando Ferretti, implemented an action plan that began with a meeting between AIA President Giovanni Mauro and other leading figures in the administration of Italian sport. They established a formal date to begin

33 ‘Seguendo la nostra strada’, La Vita Sportiva, p.1.
34 ‘Crisi di Campionato’, La Gazzetta, 1/6/26, p.3.
35 ‘Che sarà del football italiano’, La Gazzetta, 18/6/26, p.1.
36 Ibid., p.1.
mediation and a cooling off period to assess any possible solutions in the meantime. Ferretti also drew a concession from the AIA that its members would continue to work out of love for the game. The second meeting, convened by Ferretti, at the expressed desire of the PNF secretary Augusto Turati, established a compromise whereby all parties accepted the Sanguinetti decision was not an attack on the dignity and subjectivity of referees, nor could it be interpreted as one. Thereafter, as *La Gazzetta* announced, both clubs in question and the AIA accepted that the match had been annulled for ‘sporting reasons’.  

Contentious as the reasons were, the brokered agreement seemed to suit all parties, although the AIA later endorsed the complete honourability of Sanguinetti. More importantly, the interests of the aggrieved parties and the FIGC had been subordinated to CONI in the national sporting interest, during what Ferretti later referred to as a ‘temporary regency’ period. Significantly, *La Gazzetta* recorded the meeting as concluding with a vote of thanks to Turati for his interest in the sport and a pledge to unconditionally serve the nation. In return, Ferretti promised to express the sentiments of the agreement directly to the party secretary, before convening another meeting as soon as possible. Although the crisis had been temporarily averted and the championship restarted, the decision had seriously weakened Federal Council, according to *La Gazzetta*. With attention turning towards the phase of reconstruction CONI, which had already been reordered along Fascist lines, was given a free hand to establish a new directorate that would reorganise the Football Federation.  

Ferretti’s blueprint for the future of calcio still had to mediate between the needs of the game and the desires of the regime. As Roghi noted, the new championship ‘needed to find a point of harmony between the superior rights of the sport as a racial gymnasium - gymnasia of discipline, courage and solidarity - and the rights of the clubs to affirm and consolidate their sporting apprenticeships in the long term.”  

In what was arguably the most significant act in the history of calcio, Ferretti appointed a panel of three experts on 7 July, giving them a mandate to radically restructure the statutes of Italian football to reflect the realities and demands of the new political era. While he believed there was much to renew in both the laws and spirit of the game, calcio

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38 'I pensiero del Presidente del C.O.N.I., per una ripresa normale della vita calcistica e sull'attività sportiva nazionale', *La Gazzetta*, 27/7/26, p.3.  
39 'La vertenza degli arbitri…', *La Gazzetta*, p.1.  
40 'La situazione del football italiano', *La Gazzetta*, 1/7/26, p.1.  
needed to subordinate its activity to Fascism's new concept of physical education, while the clubs themselves had to impose more self-discipline to end the sort of incidents that had stimulated the crisis in the first place. If this could be achieved he anticipated more peaceful contests that would neither result in rancour among the winners and losers nor inflame the causes of *campanilismo* that contradicted the spirit of Fascist fraternity. Ferretti's alternative was stark, if this proved impossible: 'Football would be fatally condemned to degenerate into the trick of a money grabber, worthy of repressive police measures and the contempt of the citizens.... Because it is a grave problem we are setting about resolving it in a Fascist manner: that is seriously.'

The Roman Fascist bureaucrat and future Prefect Italo Foschi, engineer Paolo Graziani and lawyer/referee Giovanni Mauro were nominated to discuss the organisation of the next championship; assign clubs to the various divisions; classify players; organise taxation and establish the hierarchy of the governing body. Their work was completed by 2 August when Ferretti was handed the *Carta di Viareggio*. According to Zanetti and Tornabuoni: football was reordered to reflect 'a general and revolutionary concept of government.'

At the meeting during which the three experts delivered their proposals the tone for the future of Italian football was immediately established by Ferretti, who opened the proceedings with a round of applause in honour of the national team that was playing in Stockholm. He also drew attention to that year's smoothly organised play-off for the Lega Nord championship, both of which the CONI secretary, General Corbari, believed gave great hope for the 'continued improvement in the physical education of the masses.'

**The Carta di Viareggio**

Above all, the Carta substituted the old Federal Council with the Direttorio Federale. A theoretically elected board of governors its members were selected by the president of CONI for the first two years, after which a further reform established that all federation heads would be appointed by an assembly nominated by the Duce. In effect, the president's role

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42 'I pensiero del Presidente...', *La Gazzetta*, p.3.  
43 Ibid., p.3.  
44 'Il C.O.N.I. ha nominato gli esperti', *La Gazzetta*, 8/7/26, p.3.  
46 'La nuova carta del calcio italiano', *La Gazzetta*, 3/8/26, p.3.  
was to approve rather than nominate officers,\(^{48}\) the FIGC having been subordinated beneath CONI that was already an organ of the party. The FIGC president and the Direttorio Federale now exercised complete power and authority over all matters within the football federation, this transition to Fascist sport being illustrated by the addition of the *fascio* to the sabaudo shield that was on the crest of all CONI members. [see Appendix I, Figs. 1&2]

A new complaints procedure established that any matters regarding the condition of the pitch should be raised before the start of the game. Those resulting from incidents during the tie now had to be submitted directly to the referee within 30 minutes of the final whistle. No doubt with the Casale-Torino contest in mind, Ferretti explained how these regulations were specifically intended to cure Italian football of the ‘protest mania’ that had enabled some clubs to get victories at the adjudicator’s table that stronger teams achieved on the pitch.\(^{49}\) Complaints among teams competing in the National League and division one went directly to the new board of the superior divisions. The second division was governed by a board of the northern and southern leagues, with authority for the third division resting with regional committees. Having consulted these bodies, any club that remained unsatisfied could appeal directly to the FIGC directorate that had been appointed by the regime.

This included the Syndicate Board that was responsible for all FIGC administrative and financial matters, plus the *Comitato Italiano Tecnico Arbitrale* (CITA) - referees association - that assumed responsibility for overseeing referee discipline, selection and training in the internationally accepted rules. Although CITA was subordinated to the Direttorio Federale, crucially, it was given unquestionable authority over the dismissal of any referees for technical reasons.\(^{50}\) Despite this concession, the replacement of the former independent referees fiduciary/representative by CITA regional directors meant that by 1930, the new class of referees had been brought firmly under control.\(^{51}\) No longer meriting the ire of the supporters or the scowls of the regime, crowds and clubs were now expected to accept their expertise. As *Il Bargello* announced, this was on the ‘understanding that today the class of referees is as the regime wants it: honest and competent. Whoever does not want to understand it will do well to keep quiet.’\(^{52}\)

While these measures took control of the political aspects of the game, there were other areas in which the charter also reformed *calcio* to suit and reflect the new Fascist order.


\(^{49}\) ‘L'on Ferretti illustra la riforma calcistica’, *La Gazzetta*, 5/8/26, p.5.

\(^{50}\) Zanetti & Tornabuoni, *Il Giuoco del Calcio*, p.63.

\(^{51}\) For a detailed discussion of these changes see ‘Campi Sportivi’, *Il Bargello*, 2 & 30/8/31 and 6/9/31.
The most significant act of the restructure was the formation of the first national division, which had been mooted for some time. The new Lega Nazionale comprised of 20 teams: 16 from the old northern league, three from the Lazio and Campagna divisions of the southern leagues, with the final position being established by a play-off. The teams were then divided into two divisions according to economic and geographical considerations, with the new national champion determined by a series of play-off matches among the top three teams in each division. The last placed team in each league was relegated to Division I with the corresponding winners promoted. It was a change that Ferretti hoped would place more significance on the ‘national’ element of the competition by bringing the two strongest clubs from the capital, plus Napoli, directly into competition with teams from the north, thereby forming ‘new horizons to the sport in the south’.

Economic and geographical considerations restricted Division I to an inter-regional basis. With three leagues in the northern section and one in the south, the overall winner was again decided by play-off matches. Division II was smaller and inter-regional, with a third division restricted to a regional competition with inter-regional finals. In essence, league football had not changed beyond recognition. However, the principle of a truly national competition had been established, even if it was still contested on a north-south basis. It was the first step in the regime’s unification drive that culminated in the formation of a single national division, within two years, in which only the best teams from the length and breadth of the peninsula would compete.

In addition to league football, a number of cup competitions were also introduced. The Coppa d’Ora (Gold Cup) was established for the 14 clubs in the national division that failed to qualify for the play-off matches to decide the national champion. The Coppa Italia (Italian Cup) was also re-introduced to ensure the smaller clubs received a full complement of fixtures, in addition to the opportunity to compete against the bigger and more lucrative teams. With these cup competitions in mind, Ferretti argued that not only had the rights and interests of all clubs, both big and small, been defended, but the sport had also been protected as a whole. The introduction of cup competitions brought the composite pieces of the puzzle closer towards an integrated national picture, the benefits of which were expected to be reflected in an improved national team at the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam.

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54. ‘L’on Ferretti illustra la riforma…’, *La Gazzetta*, 5/8/26, p.3.
Footballers themselves were not exempt from the Carta’s scrutiny either. Divided into amateur and non-amateur categories, the individual’s status was decided by a CONI commission. CONI also assumed responsibility for strictly imposing the rules governing amateurism, with the harshest sanctions possible levied against those players and clubs that contravened them. Amateurs signed one-year contracts for their club but were permitted to become ‘non amateurs’ at any time, although any return to their old status required two years of inactivity. ‘Non amateur’ players were similarly committed to their clubs for a period of twelve months and despite not being considered professional, they were allowed reimbursement for any expenses or loss of income incurred through playing football.55

Players could transfer between clubs from the 1 July each year but they were not able to play for two different teams in the same season, although, at the FIGC’s discretion, clubs were able to replace players called up for national service.

The introduction of ‘non amateur’ status was a significant change en route to establishing and legalising professionalism. An effective definition of professionalism would have benefited both clubs and players, but FIFA could only fudge the issue. In the new charter the FIGC’s definition of ‘non amateur’ status reflected Article 113 of FIFA’s rules, which established that a non-amateur player was one reimbursed for the loss of earnings.56

Only weeks earlier a FIFA commission had failed to reach such an agreement, arguing instead that players who made up their losses in earnings were to be considered professionals.

Ultimately, according to *La Gazzetta*, FIFA passed the responsibility onto the individual football associations, leaving each one ‘free to resolve the problem in a manner that reflected the principles of amateurism’.57 Naturally, this self-regulatory attempt to standardise amateurism and professionalism throughout Europe was ineffectual and open to abuse. For Italian football it was left to the Carta di Viareggio to provide some definition to the blurred borders of amateurism. It was also hoped this would improve the nation’s football prowess by forming, within the first and second divisions, a nucleus of genuinely amateur players capable of striving for the future Olympic team.58 True amateurism supported by the spirit of fair play was an endearing image that the regime was keen to promote especially when confronting nations that it considered less honourable.

57 ‘Nelle conversazioni di Bruxelles presenti 14 nazioni il problema del dilettantismo é discusso ma non risolto’, *La Gazzetta*, 15/3/26, p.4.
The principle of amateurism itself was also strongly supported as a foil against increasing professionalisation that was thought to have been threatening the morality of the game. While calcio was acknowledged as having progressed enormously, some believed this had come at a moral cost. As Guido Beer, the secretary to the President of the Council of Ministers, explained in 1928:

> The capital problem of the Italian sporting life is that of slowing the enormous development of professionalism that is most dangerous to the nation. The professional must call himself so, because while it is not a dishonour, it is when you call yourself amateur when you regularly receive large sums (see footballers), or if you are kept all year by the management of great hotels, or if you travel in first class and sleeping carriages.  

Unfortunately, this increasing professionalisation of the game had not improved the financial position of the individual clubs, which had been a key factor in the 1926 crisis. As Leone Boccali noted in Lo Sport Fascista: ‘the public that pay their ten or fifteen lire to watch a football match from the popular areas are amazed to hear all the societies, big or small, complain annually of disastrous balance sheets. Counting the large takings, evidently disposes clubs to spend cheerfully.’

Part of this expenditure was accounted for by the increasing importance of the players themselves and the development of a transfer system. In 1930 some footballers were reputed to be earning an average wage of L.500-600 per month, while those who moved away from their home town or city were remunerated with up L.1,000 relocation expenses. Some of the smaller clubs that attempted to buy themselves a position in the national league, among the giants that spent millions of Lire every year, found themselves unable to afford to keep their best players. The result was the emergence of the transfer list that Boccali described as: ‘a form of sporting slavery that fed and prompted markets.’ Yet those who noted the faults of the transfer system also appreciated its inspirational merits for talented players that might emerge from the masses. For those capable of winning the toughest international matches, the transfer was an incentive and reward for their efforts to reach their maximum potential. Those that failed to attain this standard of excellence remained duty bound to their clubs where they were expected to give their all for its colours.

59 'L'on Ferretti illustra la riforma...', La Gazzetta, p.3.
60 'Un problema morale e sportivo', Lo Sport Fascista, 8, 1929, p.50.
61 'Le “mediocrità” e le liste di trasferimento', La Nazione, 5/8/30, p.5.
62 'Un problema morale…', Lo Sport Fascista, p.50.
63 'Le “mediocrità” e le liste…', La Nazione, p.5.
The clubs tried to protect themselves against their ‘investments’ leaving to play for other teams but there were still a number of routes by which the players could obtain a move. Enticed by attractive offers, they would often neglect to train properly, demand extras and exaggerate injuries. In essence, they were exercising their empowerment from calcio’s increasing professionalisation, albeit sometimes disreputably. One example was the alleged case of the player who refused to represent his team unless the club directors settled a significant gambling debt incurred the previous night. It was such incidents that were held up as examples of the damage being done to the morality of the game and Italian sport in general, Leone Boccali identifying money as the source of evil, in Lo Sport Fascista. While there was no suggestion that these ‘professional’ players had lost their love of the game, their lifestyle was thought to have generally reduced their combative instincts that were only truly called upon for decisive or international matches.

The ultimate danger was the example this set to the nation’s youngsters, especially as the FIGC’s legislation dictated that every registered player needed ‘to have a clean record and be an unquestionable example of arduous activity in their private and professional life.’ It was a hopeful measure intended to discourage those who thought football was a relatively easy game for which players were well recompensed. In organic Fascist society, there was no room for team members looking for the easy option. Boccali’s view on the degenerative effects of the game was supported by other journalists, such as Vittorio Varale, who argued that praise for champion athletes needed be contained within acceptable limits if the mass of youngsters were to talk about their heroes in a more restrained manner. While the champion athletes could inspire the stars of the future, they could also portray the worst possible example to those that looked up and admired them.

It was such ideas that led some, like Boccali, to reconsider the benefits of high profile sporting activities. Arguing that calcio had imposed too high a price for its contribution to propaganda, he suggested it had become ‘an enemy of healthily intended and practised sport; worse still, an enemy of society that distracts rich energies by turning them into drop-outs: youngsters from 28-30 will need to restart their existence all over again.’ His fears were increasingly echoed by the journalist Giuseppe Centauro who believed that sport’s primary

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64 ‘Un problema morale…’, Lo Sport Fascista, pp.50-51.
65 Ibid., p.51.
66 FIGC, Annuario Italiano Giuoco del Calcio, 1928, p.144.
68 ‘Un problema morale e sportivo’, Lo Sport Fascista, pp.51-52.
role should be to spiritually guide the young ‘onto the lawful platform of life: work. Here is the programme. Sport must not forget this imperative need of man: to work.69

Reflecting the game’s recent history, Boccali suggested that only intervention from the highest authority could restore its health for the benefit of Italian sport as a whole. The restorative tonic that he and others had been proposing for some time was to prevent footballers from joining clubs outside of their region, province of birth or place of permanent residence. In an interview in 1929, Arpinati was asked what dangers he foresaw in such a measure, especially for southern regions such as Calabria and Basilicata. His primary concern was the potential impact on the game’s propaganda role, with particular reference to how the regime expected it to contribute to the nation’s psychological and physical unification. Whereas foreign players had once been the main sources of strength and education at many clubs, some considered the technical development of the Italian game sufficient to have rendered them superfluous, with their roles now fulfilled by the best Italians.

While acknowledging the measure’s potential for reducing the professionalisation of calcio, Arpinati feared it would also arrest the game’s technical development and its importance for propaganda. Restricting the movement and transfer of players between regions might remove the element of competition and, thus, the incentive to improve skills and achieve the highest standards. More importantly, he was concerned the proposed measure might prevent some regions from potentially raising their playing standards to enable them to compete with any other in the country, thereby destroying the equilibrium ‘that is indispensable to the fortunes of the national game’.70 Consequently, any law preventing clubs from purchasing players from outside of their region might have inhibited the ambitious ones from improving.

However, the degree to which the Italian game had raised its standards contributed to the misguided notion that it no longer needed or could benefit from the influx of foreign players. This desire to italianise calcio was responsible for one of the Carta di Viareggio’s more short-sighted rulings that banned clubs from signing foreign players. With many having already made commitments, the 1926-27 season was designated a transitory period in which clubs were permitted to sign two foreign footballers, although only one was able to play in each match. The following season none were allowed and by 1928 the FIGC’s annual

69 'Le “mediocrità” e le liste di trasferimento', La Nazione, p.5
70 'I problemi del Calcio nazionale nelle chiare parole dell’on Arpinati', Il Littoriale, 23/1/29, p.3.
publication was able to clarify the formerly grey area: ‘In the Italian championship only players of Italian nationality and citizenship are allowed to compete.’ It was an indisputably xenophobic and opportunist measure with which the regime nailed its colours to the FIGC mast by arguing that foreigners could not contest an ‘Italian championship’. According to Tornabuoni and Zanetti’s book on the FIGC legislation, the restrictions were both timely and necessary in the interests of the national spirit, to ensure ‘the Italian championship did not become a faded subsidiary of the Austrian or Hungarian; and so that it did not impede the more important claims of Italian players’.

The pragmatic compromise during the transition period when all foreign players were supposed to have been released resulted in some confusion even within government circles. Having asked for clarification from the President of the Council of Ministers in 1928, the Minister for the Interior was informed that: ‘Footballers of other nationalities are not authorised to participate in the Italian championship. Societies affiliated to the Italian Federation can only appoint foreign coaches when they cannot find anybody suitable in the motherland.’

Yet the law on foreign players was pointless at best; if not outright damaging to the prospects of Italian football. As intended, it did successfully increase the number of northern Italian footballers playing for southern teams in the 1929-30 season, although this came at the loss of those foreign players that had originally raised technical standards. The counter productivity of this myopic measure was illustrated by the achievements of the Uruguayan and Argentine national teams at the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics, which alerted the regime not only to its mistake, but also to the pool of South American talent with strong genealogical links to Italy.

The ban on foreign players soon became one of the more unpopular aspects of the charter for the clubs and the regime, as both appreciated the opportunities they were missing. While there was no official reform, the legislation was by-passed on a technicality as the sons of first generation ex-patriot Italians, primarily from Argentina and Uruguay, were welcomed back to form the basis upon which the golden era was built. It is difficult to defend this aspect of the law against charges of racism, although the interpretation of Zanetti and Tornabuoni was more from a nationalist than a racist perspective. While arguing that it was

71 FIGC, Annuario Italiano Giuoco del Calcio, 1928, p.145.
72 ‘L’on Ferretti illustra la riforma...’, La Gazzetta, p.3.
73 Zanetti & Tornabuoni, Il Giuoco del Calcio, p.175.
impossible to allow 'antinational' players to compete within any branch of Italian sport, they also correctly identified how the Fascist concept of nationality was more dependent upon an individual’s commitment 'to the national ends' than their blood and birth.75

Some foreign coaches were allowed to work in Italy, although they too were eventually attacked by the Carta’s xenophobia. As CONI Commissario Straordinario - Extraordinary Commissioner - Augusto Turati publicly disapproved of foreign coaches and imposed a limit on the number permitted to work in the country. In the future, clubs that wished to employ them were obliged to first seek permission from the CONI secretary, before making any offer of employment.76

This attempt to limit the number of foreign coaches was as short-sighted as the restriction upon players, as many, such as the Austrian Hermann Fellsner and the Hungarians Hugo Meisl and Arpad Weisz, had contributed hugely towards the modernisation of the Italian game. In fact, in a cruel disregard of his contribution to the development of calcio, Weisz, who was a Hungarian Jew, was forced to resign from coaching in January 1939 following the introduction of the Racial Laws. He was later deported and eventually died in a concentration camp.77

At the time, the Danubian countries dominated continental football and while the overall number of foreign coaches in Italy was reduced, the practical reality was that the best were still permitted to work and develop the Italian game. However, to increase the number of suitably qualified Italians a coaching school was established in 1933, as part of a 'University of Calcio'. Although the 'University' concept was short-lived, a one-week summer residential course was established in Rome in the hope that at some point in the future all coaches might be Italian.78 The Florentine sports weekly Lo Stadio declared it an 'excellent initiative, a most desirable institution that will take Italian football away...from the intrusive foreign technical direction'.79 In his opening address to the first intake of coaches in 1933, Arpinati also drew attention to the way that foreign influence was thought to have contributed to the game’s moral decline. As he explained to the aspiring coaches, they

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74 ACS, PCM 1928-30, f.3.2.5. n.3941, Fonogramma n.20930, 'Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministeri', undated, approximately August 1928.
75 Zanetti & Tomabuoni, Il Giuoco del Calcio, p.174.
76 'Turati e gli allenatori stranieri', La Nazione, 25/1/29, p.5.
78 'Le belle iniziative della F.I.G.C. Una scuola per allenatori Italiani', Il Calcio Illustrato, II, 8, 24/2/32, p.6.
79 'La scuola degli allenatori', Lo Stadio, 5/2/33 p.1.
needed to teach the Italian youngsters how "to play with openness and discipline, and not to wait for the right moment to foul and cheat when not seen by the referee"."  

Coaches wishing to train at the new institution needed to have reached a requisite educational standard in addition to having played football at a respected level. The two elements were considered crucial due to the various demands of the position that required the individual to be the trainer, coach and technical director. So diverse were the qualities demanded of an excellent coach that Lo Stadio suggested the term was no longer appropriate and that the position should be called Maestro. If the new term clarified the role, it also erased the game’s English origins that had introduced trainer and Mister into calcio’s lexicon. It was indicative of another facet of the Carta di Viareggio: that of linguistic nationalism.

In effect, the Carta merely rubber-stamped a process that had already begun prior to the official changes. At a conference on sport in the Fascist state in 1925, Ferretti announced that the Roman salute would be obligatory before the start of all matches. The replacement of ‘Hip, Hurrah’ with the more romanesque ‘Eja, Eja, Alalà’ demonstrated how the nationalisation of the game also extended to the players. As Zanetti and Tornabuoni noted: ‘When the player enters the field, he represents the Federation more than just the society to which he belongs; he needs to control himself according to the principles of dignity, chivalry and courtesy that the federal laws and customs prescribe.’ Besides changing the language, it also reflected the regime’s attempt to italianise or manufacture a new history of the game through words and symbols. In 1925, the journalist and author Amerigo Bresci took up this theme in his book on the question of Italian identity in calcio. Attacking foreign words that had become an inherent part of the language of the national game, he railed against members of the press who used terms such as corner, team and penalty and demanded they promote the Italian identity of what he believed was an inherently Italian game. It was an argument regularly employed during the Fascist era, whereby the roots of football were attributed to the ancient sport of calcio Fiorentino or

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80 ‘S.E. Arpinati, gli arbitri e la stampa’, Il Calcio Illustrato, II, 11, 15/3/33, p.4.
81 Ibid., p.1.
82 Amerigo Bresci, La questione dell’italianità nel giuoco del calcio, Prato, M. Martini, 1926, p.48.
83 Zanetti & Tornabuoni, Il Giuoco del Calcio, p.134.
84 Bresci, La questione dell’italianità. Further glossaries were printed in a number of contemporary football publications, such as the official FIGC, Annuario Italiano, pp.463-67.
calcio storico, a traditional folk game of the middle ages that was also restored to prominence by the regime.\(^5\)

To educate the readership and reinforce the modern game’s Italian identity, Bresci assembled a glossary of foreign words and their ‘correct’ Italian counterparts. These ranged from standard terms such as goal kick (calcio di rinvio), forward (attaccante) and kick-off [sic] (calcio d’inizio) to the more bizarre or specialised plungeon (tutto: uno dei caratteristici movimenti del portiere per impedire che la palla entri in porta) and daisy cutter (tiro radente, o raso terra).\(^6\)

As the era’s famous voice of football, Niccolo Carosio’s radio broadcasts also contributed to the italianisation of calcio’s language and the regime’s exploitation of the game. His style was distinguishable by the way he replaced many of the traditional English words with the preferred and sometimes cumbersome Italian alternatives, even occasionally inventing expressions of his own that became a permanent feature of calcio culture.\(^7\) A talented and famous broadcaster, he brought the game to life for those masses that collected throughout the country for their Sunday ritual, many of which had never even kicked a ball or seen a stadium. His nationwide fame was courtesy of the regime’s investment in radio, which, up until 1928, had experienced considerable difficulties with live broadcasts.\(^8\) Once these problems were overcome Carosio’s broadcasts became a perfect propaganda opportunity that the regime exploited by, apparently, pressuring him to adopt the italiansed language of calcio that the Carta di Viareggio officially sanctioned.

**Calcio goes south**

On the eve of the 1926 season the championship and Italian football as a whole had changed to meet the needs of the modern game and the regime, but not beyond recognition. There was of course the introduction of a national league with promotion and relegation from inter-regional and regional divisions below, none of which were perceived to have had too negative an effect. It was also appreciated that first and foremost, the structural changes were intended to develop the national aspects of football, which not only included the improvement of the Italian national team but also the relationship between northern and


\(^6\) Bresci, *La questione dell’italianità*, pp.45-47.

\(^7\) ‘La radiocronaca all’italiana: Nicolò Carosio’, *Ludus*, p.45.
southern Italy. With contact between teams from the north and south previously restricted to just the play-off final between the respective league winners, it was now both unavoidable and of critical importance for the development of the game and the nation. By standardising the laws CONI established uniformity, thereby removing one of the hurdles that had prevented the full integration of the south into the national football structure. To achieve this, CONI had taken account of those southern societies that had previously not only felt excluded from the system but had also been unable to assert themselves due to insurmountable geographical, economic and transport difficulties.88

Despite the importance of national integration, there was no single underlying motive behind the restructuring of football. In fact, the changes were forced by a number of interrelated demands, many of which were included in Vittorio Pozzo’s personal definition of what a championship should be:

The championship is the most egotistical manifestation in sport that one can imagine. Its purpose should be to provide a solid and irremovable base to the work of the big and small clubs and to confer regularity on the season.... Its mission...should be that of recalling and capturing the attention of the public, of always forming, preparing and developing new players, of creating fresh energies, while maintaining and improving the existing forces. 90

If, at some point, ‘to serve the needs of the regime’ had been included in his description, it would have perfectly described what emerged as calcio in a blackshirt.

Reflecting on the events of 1926, Ferretti argued that the crisis had been one of authority as much as it was one of finance. While the referees strike had brought a number of issues to a head, he believed the clubs had already shown themselves to have been in open rebellion with their deliberately small financial contributions to the FIGC deficit which, by 30 June, had reached L.20,000.91 That a further L.50,000 was raised in the month of July alone, suggest that the clubs were either deliberately withholding their financial resources in protest or that the intervention of Ferretti, on behalf of the regime, had encouraged them to support the national institution. Either way, the Federation’s financial position was recovering, even if it was not cured. Further economies were made by restricting the costs and frequency of the numerous Federation meetings while the duplicitous bodies were also trimmed to a more economical and practical size. As Pozzo reflected in 1928:

Who can forget those famous meetings that started at nine in the evening and ended at four in the morning without concluding anything; those discussions that took five, six, seven hours to decide

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88 For a history of radio under the regime see, F. Monteleone, La radio nel periodo fascista. Studi e documenti 1922-1945, Venezia, Marsiglio, 1975; G. Isola, Abbassa la tua radio per favore... Storia dell' ascolto radiofonico dell' Italia fascista, La Nuova Italia, Firenze, 1990.
what one person could have done in ten minutes; those struggles that degenerated into even more ignoble uproar than one can imagine?

....This used to happen once. The Regime, intervening energetically, introduced swift and practical systems, revitalising the environment. 92

Having assumed extraordinary powers during the ‘regency period’, one of Ferretti’s first moves was to make Leandro Arpinati president of the FIGC. According to the CONI secretary, his energy, intelligence, authority and love of the game was above and beyond any praise he could bestow upon him. 93 With his appointment, the Federation’s central office was also moved from Turin to Bologna, the seat of Arpinati’s power. Undoubtedly it suited him, but it also seems to have been part of a deliberate attempt to move the headquarters of the game closer to Rome. Besides undermining the original Italian capital and calcio power base of Turin and minimising the cost of relocating members of the Federal Board, the move was also designed to continue the integration of the south into the national game; Bologna was merely a political staging post before the Federation’s final move to the capital.

In an angry response, the northern press launched a violent campaign against the decision that it said was designed to serve Arpinati. 94 Its anger was replicated in Bologna in 1928 when the FIGC finally moved to Rome, the Bolognese sports paper La Pedata announcing the move with a bitter headline: ‘We affirm the right of Rome to pocket the Football Federation and the two towers, the [piazza] Neptune, the Littoriale and the rest.’ 95 The FIGC’s transfer to the capital coincided with Arpinati’s appointment as under-secretary to the Interior Ministry, but realistically this was just another pragmatic centralising opportunity for the regime after which the office never moved again. In the space of three years, the Federation had been stealthily, if not unnoticeably, relocated from its original northern periphery to the new centre of the nation. It perfectly exemplified what the Carta di Viareggio had been designed to achieve.

The Carta was unquestionably nationalist and patriotic in its efforts to both improve and italianise the game. One journalist likened the decisions made at Viareggio to a ‘surgical operation’ that would morally and sportingly revitalise the national game within a year. 96 While the charter introduced the fundamentals necessary to achieve this, it soon became clear that revolutionising and italianising the system would be an ongoing process. Evolution,

93 ‘L’ on. Ferretti illustra la riforma’, p.3.
94 Ghirelli, Storia del Calcio, p.92.
95 ‘Affermiamo il diritto di Roma di papparsi la Federazione del Calcio e occorendo le Due Torri, il Nettuno, Il Littoriale e il resto’, La Pedata, November 1928, p.1.

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experimentation and perpetual change were the modus operandi by which the regime believed perfection would be reached and then maintained in all fields. This certainly applied to the world of sport, which, according to Il Bargello, had shown its readiness to ‘confront new organisational problems and experiment with new formulas, for only through practical experience is it possible to perfect a great task of work that encapsulates everything about our sporting movement’.  

The next stage of the process through which the regime moulded football to its needs came in 1929, with the amalgamation of the northern and southern divisions into a single national league. For the top eight teams from the north and south divisions that merged to form Serie A, the new structure represented a better way of determining the national hierarchy and developing the Italian game. La Nazione lauded the initiative for providing football with ‘a new impulse, organising, encouraging and giving it robustness and meaning’. Yet, while clubs in Serie B had the opportunity to secure promotion to the top division, life in the lower league was a harsh economic counter-blow. Expenses increased due to the demands of national fixtures at the same time as gate receipts declined following the loss of the most attractive matches.  

The desperate financial situation for these clubs led to calls for reductions in their tax payments to the FIGC, in order to ‘equally favour the development of football in all regions of Italy’. To ease the financial burdens imposed by extensive national travel, others suggested the division revert back to a regional basis of four smaller leagues, which seemed to defeat the object of the changes in the first place. However, on closer inspection, there were aspects to this that could also have contributed to the regime’s nationalisation of football and continued to introduce fresh teams and energies into Serie A each season. Of more interest was the way the proposed system would have guaranteed the south not only the permanent representation in the top flight that it lacked under the existing order, but also the opportunity to continually increase the number of southern clubs in Serie A, so long as none were relegated. The one snag with this system was that it could not guarantee the promotion of the strongest four teams in Serie B, thereby potentially undermining the quality of Serie A.

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97 ‘Nuovi progetti per il campionato di calcio’, Il Bargello, 16/6/29, p.6.
98 ‘La sistemazione del Campionato italiano di calcio per le due massime categorie nazionali’, La Nazione, 5/7/29, p.5.
The south also remained a key factor in the restructuring further down the football league pyramid, as the regionally based Division I - the rung below Serie B - was enlarged to help southern inclusion. As Arpinati explained in *Il Littoriale*: ‘We wanted to enlarge the first division above all, to help the south, which, besides benefiting from a 50 per cent reduction in match taxes, will save a notable amount in travelling costs.’

The formation of Serie A also signalled the final defeat of the smaller clubs that, having long punched above their weight in the FIGC structure, had resisted all attempts to reduce their status. Moreover, the change to a single, national division represented more than just an effort to raise the technical standards of the game that were thought to have been suffering under the strain of such a long season. It also continued the regime’s rationalisation and nationalisation of calcio.

Such was the belief in the merits of the new national league structure that on news of the imminent changes, even the Florentine Fascist weekly *Il Bargello* publicly supported it, despite its negative effect on the Tuscan clubs of Fiorentina and Prato. *Lo Stadio* also championed the national league idea and opposed its expansion into two regional divisions of 18, despite how this would have ensured top-flight representation for Fiorentina and its close neighbour. Disregarding the potential damage to the region’s prospects in the name of the national game, *Lo Stadio* suggested the number of teams competing in Serie A and B should in fact be reduced to a final figure of 14. It was an argument supported by Vittorio Pozzo and Emilio Colombo who both believed that a smaller championship would improve the national team.

While there may have been technical merits to such a proposal, the idea of restricting the national division to 16 teams caused great consternation. Such a decision would have excluded Triestina (Trieste), Lazio (Rome) and Napoli (Naples), with the obvious implications for a league that the regime wanted to be truly ‘national’. All three teams were admitted into Serie A for the first season, *La Nazione* declaring the decision: an ‘act of great sporting justice, greeted with enthusiasm by all the nation’. On what authority the newspaper spoke for the nation is difficult to imagine, but its pronouncement was an example of how the Fascist daily both accepted and promoted the regime’s desire to subsume local desires beneath national needs.

Yet the decision to expand the league was calculated on a far deeper basis than merely sporting justice, as Arpinati outlined in an interview discussing the new format. While agreeing that in many cases sporting reasons had prevailed, he explained that propaganda had also been an important factor, especially when considering the benefits to the national game of including those big cities that still did not have a single team capable of competing at the top level. In the future, any smaller cities that wanted to secure representation in the national league had to decide which of the many existing local teams would be supported. As Arpinati further explained, this was as important for the regime as it was for the cities themselves:

I need to say with complete frankness that if in two cities like Trieste or Florence bodies had not already existed that vowed to succeed in becoming worthy of competing with the best squads in Italy, it would have been necessary to create them.

The inevitable result was that some small and medium-sized clubs were prevented from entering the top division by their more illustrious neighbours, despite their respective abilities. For example, Temana claimed the right to join the national division after finishing in an equivalent position to Fiorentina in its section of the old first division. Likewise, Fiume complained that having finished one place above Triestina, it too had earned the right to join Serie A. Neither club succeeded, which exposed a selection criteria that was based upon more than just playing strengths and what Arpinati described as a 'minimal difference in final league table position'.

A talented team needed the support of both the club and the city if it was to compete on a national basis, such as the Società Sportive Modenesi that was created by the merger of the local teams of Panaro, Fratellanza and Modena FC. Despite conforming to the Fascist blueprint, prior to the official ratification of this new society the prefect still requested Arpinati’s sanction as Minister of the Interior. Justifying the merger as follows, Arpinati could hardly refuse: ‘Taking into account the aims of the organisers of the new Society, sports fans in Modena want to maintain and, on the contrary, increase the glorious traditions of the pre-existing Societies’. Nonetheless, such mergers were not always popular with the fans themselves. One letter from the Prefect of Bari apologised for a complaint made direct

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106 'Le ragioni del nuovo assetto calcistico...', Il Littoriale, p.1.
107 Ibid., p.1.
109 ACS, PCM 1928-30, f.3.2.5. n.9315, 'Modena – Società sportive', 25/11/29, pp.1-2
to Mussolini that was said to have qualified as dissent towards the Fascist Provincial Secretary’s decision to merge the Società Sportive “Ideal” and Bari.\(^{110}\)

This desire to raise football onto a truly national level was reinforced by the way the regime took the game south, in every respect. On 25 March 1928 the national team played in the capital for the first time. The match against Hungary to inaugurate the new PNF stadium was more than just an ordinary international, according to the journalist Leone Boccali. Together with the stadium, it was intended ‘to strengthen and extend to the southern regions that unification of national sporting activity that makes a notable contribution to the political and spiritual unification of Italy’.\(^ {111}\)

Beyond the azzurri’s victory, the regime’s real success was achieved off the field of play. As described in Lo Sport Fascista, the match was an ‘organisational success that confounded many unwise prejudices against the southern crowd’.\(^ {112}\) The following year, the third play-off to decide the 1929 championship was also contested in Rome for the first time. Accorded even greater status than an international fixture, special trains brought supporters from all over the country to supplement the majority of spectators that came from the capital.\(^ {113}\)

The speed and extent of calcio’s development in the 1920s was huge, with the game being played in 83 of the 94 provincial capitals by the end of the decade.\(^ {114}\) While the football phenomenon was not just restricted to Italy, the Fascist intervention with the Carta di Viareggio undoubtedly redirected the game, giving it a new lease of life. Its consequent explosion in popularity was exactly what the leadership had dreamt of. Domestically and diplomatically it had been manipulated into a perfect, continual photo opportunity for all that the regime wished to purvey. As Il Bargello was proud to proclaim: ‘even in sport, Fascism is teaching the old Europe and showing its greatest export.’\(^ {115}\) Yet, despite such propaganda opportunities, the regime’s intervention also produced and exacerbated some disagreeable side-effects, most notably in the development and strengthening of local identities.

Sporting campanilismo was a relatively if not completely new phenomenon that exposed many contradictions that the regime had some difficulty in accommodating. If football was to contribute even to the construction of an imaginary Fascist national

\(^{112}\) Ibid., p.29.
\(^{113}\) ‘La finalissima del campionato di calcio’, La Nazione, 7-8/7/29, p.5.
\(^{114}\) Papa & Panico, Storia Sociale del Calcio, p.126.
community, there could be no place for destructive local rivalries. However, a glance through
the Ministry of the Interior’s record of ‘incidents’ gives a clear indication of the widespread
nature of disorder at football matches, which usually reflected long-established city-based
rivalries. It was such divisive developments that inspired Manlio Morgagni, in Il Popolo
d’Italia, to call for more discipline in sport in general and particularly football, which he
believed caused antagonisms between regions, provinces, cities, quarters and groups, as the
competitive animas of the squads extended to the fans themselves.116

While not commonplace, local rivalries also stimulated a growth in violence between
fan groups, as animosities were intensified both by a parochial press and fans’ increasing
ability and desire to travel and support the team. Incidents of this type were even occurring
prior to 1926, such as the fourth match of the previously mentioned Lega Nord play-off,
between Genoa and Bologna in 1925, when gunshots were fired during a confrontation
between rival fans at the Porta Nuova station in Turin. Set against the background of two
drawn matches and the ill-tempered, unjust and arguably corrupt third replay that encouraged
the respective cities newspapers to trade words and insults,117 it was unfortunate that two
trains carrying each team’s supporters home, left from adjacent platforms. With fans fighting
in the station and on the tracks, shots were apparently fired from a carriage carrying the
Bologna supporters. Although nobody was injured, the incident provoked much debate about
the future of calcio.

The FIGC blamed Bologna and ordered the club to pay a L.5,000 fine.
Scaremongering federal governors predictably raised fears that such behaviour would lead to
the game’s demise, although the question as to whether people wanted football to become a
‘tragic feud between communes’ played out on Sundays, was without doubt relevant.118
Equally predictably, La Voce Sportiva blamed the incident on the federal authority’s decision
to annul Bologna’s ‘victory’ in the previous meeting, the paper interpreting the whole
incident as a serious slight upon the supporters, the club and the city itself.119

The FIGC’s report into the incident claimed that the Bologna fans had not been
provoked. Denouncing this as ‘false and tendentious’ the Bologna President, F.E. Masetti,
argued that the ‘obscene gestures, foul displays, stone fights...[and]..revolver shots’ had
started with the Genoa supporters.\(^\text{120}\) Bologna’s ire was fuelled by a belief that the league structure was deliberately skewed to the benefit of the longer established Genoa Football & Cricket Club.\(^\text{121}\) One thousand Bologna fans demonstrated in the city against the FIGC’s decision, which the Bologna Prefect, Arturo Bocchini, recorded as ‘an imposing public assembly’ that wanted to take action against the FIGC leadership’s ‘revolting misuse of power’.\(^\text{122}\) In his letter to the Minister of the Interior, Bocchini declared his absolute solidarity with the fans struggle against the Federation and its ‘gross foolishness of obvious partisanship’ through which, he argued, it was trying to regain its lost authority by attacking one of Italy’s most honourable clubs.\(^\text{123}\) Despite the protests, Bologna magnanimously accepted the decision and ‘cordially extended a hand to Genoa to renew a faithfully professed friendship’.\(^\text{124}\)

Bologna clinched the title at the fifth attempt in a match played behind closed doors. The only fans to see it were Arpinati and his squadristi who stood on the side of the pitch with pistols glinting in the sun; potentially the same ones from which the shots had been fired in the station a month or so earlier.\(^\text{125}\) Besides a victory for justice, La Voce Sportiva also deemed it a victory for a new style of play: ‘a new system and a new method imported from Hungary and wisely applied by passionate and impulsive Italian characters.’\(^\text{126}\) Although a mere footnote to this lengthy collection of incidents, the tactical innovation suggests that Bologna’s achievements in the 1930s were, in part, courtesy of its exposure to new, foreign ideas and tactics.

Incidents as grave as those during the 1925 finals were both rare and shocking, but they illustrated the extent to which calcio had penetrated daily Italian life. By the mid-1920s, this strengthening of campanilismo had begun to contradict the regime’s exploitation of calcio to express and augment the national Italian identity, which began to undermine its portrayal of the homogeneous nation. Such ‘idiotic campanilistic’ tendencies were also scorned by Morgagni, in Il Popolo d’Italia: ‘It is enough to have watched only one of these matches to convince oneself of the ill they produce, provoking hostility between sons of the

\(^{120}\) ‘Un comunicato del Bologna F.C.’, La Voce Sportiva, 17/7/25, p.1.

\(^{121}\) ‘Giustizia’, La Voce Sportiva, 21/7/25, p.1.

\(^{122}\) ACS, PS 1925, b.103, D.14 Sports e Gare, Prefettura di Bologna, 21/7/25, p.1.

\(^{123}\) Ibid., pp.1-2.

\(^{124}\) ACSB, CA X, 3, 5, 1925, PG.31796, Deliberato dal Direttorio del Bologna F.C., in adunanza plenaria, 29/7/25.


same motherland living in two opposite districts, to the danger of the harmonious, unitary spirit emanating from the Regime.127

Unfortunately, the Fascist blueprint recommended the merger of many smaller municipal clubs into bigger societies that were capable of representing their cities in the national arena. Although not necessarily compulsory, the creation of a national league had encouraged many local Fascist leaders to demand a concentration of resources that would result in a team capable of competing on just such a level, as Arpinati had suggested would happen. More than just material club assets, these resources included the fans themselves that were now united behind the one local representative. This proved particularly strong in cities such as Naples and Florence that only had one team, whereas in Milan, Turin and Rome citizens were divided between dual representatives.

As has already been demonstrated and will continue to be seen in the following chapters, the restructuring of calcio was designed to integrate all Italian clubs into the new national league and was complemented by international matches being played south of Bologna. This desire to construct an all-inclusive, football nation - Italy United let us say - was disseminated to all areas and regions of the country and not only the south. One northern example was in the Trieste part of the Venezia-Giulia region. Although it had technically become part of post-1918 Italy, the inclusion of Venezia-Giulia’s principal clubs within the national league was a way of repaying the region, Trieste FC and SBS Ponziana, for their loyalty to Italy. It also visually, psychologically and effectively assimilated them into the nation. With the formation of a national championship, these clubs that had formerly been restricted to competing in the Veneto league were now able to ‘officially enter into the Italian football family’,128 thereby simultaneously affirming their Italian identities and that of the region.

Symbols were also employed for similar means, especially upon Italian regional or city flags. To celebrate the inauguration of Club Sportivo “Olimpia” Fiume’s Cantrida stadium in 1925, the club President requested flags from each Italian city. These were to symbolically adorn the new stadium and form a ‘dazzling garland of the signs of the beautiful cities of Italy, in this the most recent sister returned to the Nation’.129 Interestingly,

these examples of how calcio was exploited in the region for nationalist propaganda during the Fascist period, also continued into the years of the democratic republic.

While identities could be strongly expressed through football teams under Fascism, there was considerable concern when, rather than act as bonding agents, they exceeded the realms of acceptability and became potentially destructive forces that might attack and atomise the national community. As Il Bargello expressed in 1929:

Every football match between squads of nearby cities or from the same province, has the seeds of an incident waiting to happen…. Fascism and sport cannot tolerate this…. In sport one can be an adversary but one does not need to be an enemy. We already have enough of this at the border.\textsuperscript{130}

Despite the regime’s desire to unite the nation through calcio, the threat of campanilismo featured frequently in the press and Ministry of the Interior’s communications. In 1929 a number of entries record the exuberance of various fans spilling over into unacceptable acts and demonstrations of provincial and local identity. Such incidents were not just restricted to meetings of the big city clubs but also occurred on a local level, such as at Forli in the province of Emilia-Romagna in 1929. Like many football related incidents in this period that did not appear to be direct demonstrations of opposition activity, the Prefect of Forli was still obliged to inform the ministry in Rome of the events between the fans of AS Forli and AC Faenza:

Disputes of superiority of one over the other, rivalries of another type and an antiquated spirit of campanilismo have been the cause of irreducible antagonism between the same squads and the respective supporters; antagonism that….has degenerated into complete hostility, which has gone beyond….the character of brotherhood and of chivalrous competition that should mark similar athletic activities, encouraged and sustained, exclusively, for the best physical and moral development of the youth.\textsuperscript{131}

Earlier in the same year, there had been considerable concern regarding the match between Lazio and Napoli. With Naples possessing one of the most intense and potentially combustible city identities in the country, especially when placed in direct competition with Rome, the Questura (provincial police HQ) of Rome condemned the local Neapolitan press for escalating the importance of the match.\textsuperscript{132} One example was Il Piccolo’s encouragement of Napoli fans to draw together in a symbol of the club and to cheer the team to victory; the voice of the fans again deemed vital in achieving the desired result.\textsuperscript{133} The potential for conflict between rival sets of supporters was also recognised by Il Popolo di Roma that saw

\textsuperscript{130} ‘Epurare lo Sport’, Il Bargello, 15/12/29, p.2.
\textsuperscript{132} ACS, PS 1929, b.180, D.14 Sports e Gare, ‘Questura di Roma, Pro-Memoria’, 14/6/29, p.1.
‘the comparison between the two publics...[as]...no less interesting than that between the two squads.’

The match did not escape the Ministry of the Interior’s attention and it communicated that, if necessary, the Questura would suspend it for reasons of public order. On the eve of the match, the progress of 2,000 or more travelling Napoli fans was transmitted back to the ministry by the Questura in a number of telegrams that conveyed the sense of a military operation. While the crowd was lively the match was played in relative peace, which may have been due to either the 0-0 scoreline that kept tempers from flaring or ‘the severest police measures taken and the timely intervention of public force’ that gave the impression ‘the authorities would not have tolerated any disorderly events’.

On these occasions the rivalry between supporters of respective clubs took precedence over the sporting nature of the contest. Provincial antagonisms were also not unusual and following earlier violence between fans of the Calabrian teams of Catanzaro and Cosenza, the local press led a campaign to promote friendship between the two groups. Somewhat ambiguously, however, La Giovane Calabria stated that the 750 ‘Catanzaresi are not going to provoke. But they are not going to be the sheep in the ‘wolves’ lair.’ Once again, a heavy police presence staved off any trouble.

These few examples among many recorded by the Ministry of the Interior, show how the regime was unable to suppress the strong city-based identities that had existed throughout the peninsula for centuries and were being incited by calcio. According to the Questura of Rome, such incidents exemplified: ‘the spirit of campanilismo that...should no longer constitute any more than a sad record of the past.’

Such was the interest in the burgeoning numbers of fans and consequent local rivalries that a literature began to emerge, specific to this phenomenon, one anthropological assessment making a strong distinction between the character and nature of fans from the differing metropolitan centres. There were also natural references to the past by those who believed the new stadia were lowering the masses’ critical abilities. Yet, whatever anybody

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140 See N. Pino, Tifo sportivo e i suoi effetti, Milano, 1935.
may have said or thought about the numerical explosion of football supporters, it was impossible to ignore the regime’s efforts to transform the rituals of the traditional Sunday afternoon into something more secular and arguably more widespread. By 1934, for good or bad, Carlo Levi recorded how a vast amount of Italians followed the fortunes of their city’s team:

The stadiums are full every Sunday with enthusiastic crowds, despite the high prices; they spend hours competently discussing the respective merits of this or that player...of the papers one reads above all the sports page; on the radio one listens to match reports; on Sunday evenings the crowds anxiously and restlessly wait outside cafes for the results of the day.

The regime’s investment in the game had constructed a truly national format that certainly developed a strong sense of identity among the population, if not always in the way in which it had been hoped or intended. While the national league was formed with the specific intention of uniting Italy through the domestic game, it was also intended to raise the technical standards of Italian players with one eye on the potential benefits of a successful international team. While any international achievements would naturally have acted as a societal glue, the regime was also aware of the considerable diplomatic kudos and international prestige that might be gained from a national team capable of defeating the best countries in the world.

The Fascist restructuring had imposed profound changes on the game and it now possessed an organisational hierarchy that was capable of controlling and disciplining calcio’s main protagonists. However, this was not achievable through organisation alone, because there was also need for financial investment in the sporting infrastructure if mass audiences, the likes of which had not been seen on a regular basis since Roman times, were to be attracted and controlled. With football out of intensive care and recovering well in the Fascist convalescence unit, the regime turned its attention towards restructuring the game’s bricks and mortar by encouraging and supervising the development of stadia that were multipurpose on a number of different levels.

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141 Bianchi, ‘Sport (Dall’Italia)’, pp.46-47.
4. Building the Future

The PNF in pursuing effective sporting propaganda, which started with the intent of decisively and energetically caring for the physical education of our youth, decided to build a sports ground in every commune of Italy that, responding to the modern needs of the sport, might be easy and inexpensive to produce.¹

In terms of its organisation, the regime had already invested heavily in calcio as a conduit through which it believed an Italian Fascist identity could be stimulated, promoted and diffused throughout the majority of the population. The key to any such success was the leisure-time mobilisation of the masses, which resulted in the promotion of the fan - as opposed to merely the football follower - and the growth of the mass football crowd. Although not an entirely new phenomenon, the expansion of what had been small interest groups into tens of thousands of supporters stemmed from the regime’s promotion of the game and its construction of stadia throughout the peninsula, both of which complimented its physical education programme and drive for racial fitness.

Stadia, however, were more than just venues for football. Designed to symbolise Italy’s Roman past, Fascist present and promise for the future, they also performed an important role in the regime’s propaganda. Yet so eclectic were their sources of inspiration that they failed to conform to any consistent architectural model, as recognised by the architect Giuseppe De Finetti. Commenting on the eight stadia built for the 1934 World Cup tournament, he described their designs as showing ‘a lack of tradition and unitary method; comparing them does not only result in a lack of similarity but some do not even present a symmetrical and closed form’.²

While stadia often appeared to be conflicting representations of the past and the future, they were also examples of how the identity of many Italian cities under Fascism became closely connected with their principal, showpiece buildings that increasingly included sports arenas. More than simply representing the city however, their often diverse architecture was a powerful way of visually establishing a radical local identity that often reflected the nature of the city’s politics.

Despite calcio’s many positive contributions to society it still had its critics, many of which were concerned that the new stadia with mass crowds were little more than modern centres of degeneration. Of course, there were many others who detected more positive

¹ PNF, Camp Sportivo del Littorio, p.6.
aspects to the expansion of calcio that was quickly transforming from a game into a spectacle.

The work of theatrical writers and actors had traditionally played an important role in developing, establishing and marking new national epochs. However, as the novelist, journalist and theatre critic Massimo Bontempelli recognised, there was more to their success than merely the nature and quality of the performance itself. There was also the important role of the audience: 'The spectacle is a collaboration. The participation of the public, with its attendance and discussion of the theatre constitutes a great part of the theatrical life of a given country at a given time.' Bontempelli believed that each new era or epoch defined itself by creating its own myths that were often expounded through performance art. It is a theory that Emilio Gentile has comprehensively developed in his study of the sacralization of politics under the regime. As will be seen, Fascism was not opposed to theatre by definition, but its bourgeois exclusivity created an ethical dilemma that contradicted the new political and social order it claimed to be creating.

Mussolini attempted to combat the ideological conundrum by demanding the construction of Fascist theatres, but the regime's attempt to develop and exploit the art form failed. According to Bontempelli, this provided an opportunity for calcio to become a focal point in the cultural life of the masses. In reality, however, it already was.

Far from exclusive middle class venues impacting negatively on society, modern stadia were the mass theatres of the present and the future, novel in their dimensions, style and capacity to accommodate huge audiences that contributed to the spectacle. Bontempelli, who was a fan of the fans, described the entire experience of supporting a particular team as 'a collective act of abandon, of generosity.' While correctly identifying the growing importance of supporters, he failed to develop his argument far enough, for stadia were also key parts of the spectacle. More than just training grounds and 'theatres' for the masses, stadia unquestionably served as propaganda vehicles in the regime's attempt to construct a national culture and community. As Tim Benton notes in his study of architecture under the regime:

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1 M. Bontempelli, L'avventura novecentista, Vallecchi, Firenze, 1938, p.381.
3 Bontempelli, L'avventura novecentista, p.163.
...at every site where large numbers of people gathered, buildings, sculptures and paintings were enlisted to transform comradesship into tribalism, pride into a sense of superiority, a sense of belonging into hatred of outsiders. Buildings played a crucial role in this political process.

The need for a level playing field

Improving the desperate condition of existing sports facilities had been discussed for many years, with particular reference to the impoverished state of school sport. In the few halls and gymnasia that did exist, especially in southern Italy, there was usually a lack of any running water and washing facilities plus insufficient ventilation. This often resulted in the type of respiratory illnesses and poor physical growth among pupils that physical activity was intended to help keep at bay. Even though this paucity of facilities was seriously hindering any potential to reinvigorate the nation, in 1919 the parliamentary deputy De Capitani still found himself ridiculed in the Chamber for daring to raise the need to construct gymnasia throughout Italy.

Yet despite the polemic among socialists regarding the merits, or otherwise, of developing sporting activity among the masses, it was not until 1923 that Terzino's article in Sport e Proletariato drew any serious attention to the chronic shortage of sports facilities even in Rome, 'the most privileged city in Italy.' Those that did exist were owned by private individuals or institutions, such as the army, while outside of the capital stadia such as the Arena in Milan were primarily used for bullfighting, fairs and displays that made little contribution to the wellbeing of the masses. In response, Terzino proposed a solution that had already proven successful in other countries: 'Where they are not already, stadiums might become municipal property with the obligation on the behalf of the commune to rent them, at a reasonable price, to associations that might want to hold worthy sporting activities.'

As with their blueprint for the development of mass sport, the socialists had once again pre-empted, inspired, or stimulated Fascist plans for a national programme of stadium development. However, true as this may have been, it would be wrong to suggest the resulting construction programme was anything other than a Fascist project. As the architect Paolo Vietti-Violi observed in Casabella, the monthly dedicated to international architecture, 'the rebirth of sport and above all the spirit of sport in Italy, as wanted, directed and
organised by the Fascist Regime, has itself brought about an impressive renewal of sporting works'.

The completion of the Littorale complex in Bologna signalled the regime’s intent to take sport and stadium construction seriously, its commitment becoming law on 21 June 1928. From this point onwards, prefects were expected to familiarise themselves with CONI’s technical specifications and the potential financial difficulties that had already been experienced by many communes, prior to approving the construction or modification of sports buildings. To help make projects as economically viable as possible, the compulsory specifications for stadia were partially reduced. Nonetheless, the PNF still published a detailed pamphlet that included a variety of designs in addition to specific features and dimensions to which the new campi sportivi were expected to conform. While the regime clearly accepted its responsibility if every commune was to have its own sports facilities, equally it did not want a monopoly and was happy to encourage private initiatives, as Lo Sport Fascista’s 1929 editorial made clear:

It is necessary to fight back against the fatalistic attitude of expecting everything from the government or the commune. We think in this case that the communes might have exhausted their noble work when they gave the necessary land for the construction of the field.... The rest, that is the equipment and the management of the field, should be done by an existing in situ sports society, or by a society that could be created for the occasion.... However, one will not forget that the communal sports field must be ‘the field for everybody.’

It was hoped that such government intervention would further encourage those who had called for smaller stadia to be built and managed by local communes. The Marquis Luigi Ridolfi, president and secretary of the Tuscan Fascist Sports Authority, with the leading Florentine Fascist Alessandro Pavolini, took up the challenge in their region. After conducting a census of sports facilities in Tuscany, they informed the various Mayors of the chronic shortage: the ‘necessity for sports grounds in every centre, including small ones, makes itself more urgent and unavoidable each day. It is absolutely necessary that each commune has its own sports field, where it is possible to train and prepare our youth’. As they continued to stress, large stadiums were not always necessary, as moderately sized,

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15 ‘Ogni comune deve avere il proprio campo sportivo’, La Nazione, p.5.
more or less rectangular sports fields that could accommodate both track and field athletics and football would serve the purpose.

Others suggested the legislative demand that all football stadia possess a running track was both unfair and potentially unworkable. This was especially relevant to those southern clubs that were already struggling to survive. As the party secretary Augusto Turati identified in a circular to government officers and sports leaders: "This initiative needs to be of special advantage for sport in the south, which, due to the absolute lack of facilities, exists with great difficulty and overcomes unheard of problems."¹⁶

Motivated by the extreme lack of facilities in their region, Ridolfi and Pavolini, with the support of other significant voices such as the Florentine Fascist weekly Il Bargello, launched a campaign to rectify the issue on both the macro and micro levels. While acknowledging that the deficiency in sporting facilities was a national problem, the magazine publicised the gravity of the situation in Tuscany, where Pisa and Florence contained the only two athletics tracks among the region's nine provinces.¹⁷ It was a problem that Il Bargello considered worthy of serious state concern, especially following the 'innumerable circulars from the leaders of the PNF and CONI and after all the declarations of Turati and the sporting hierarchies.'¹⁸ Nonetheless, the generally accepted need to develop athletics facilities in the regions in particular, went unregistered, as the minimal sources of funding continued to be siphoned off by already well established sports.

Despite being a local initiative, Pisa's newly completed stadium was used to encourage the construction of such facilities throughout the peninsula, by whatever means possible. Where economic factors prevented communes from contributing to the costs, La Gazzetta suggested that alternative forms of patronage should be explored. In this way, society based or private initiatives would contribute to the physical improvement of the nation's youth.¹⁹ Citing a fundraising measure employed in Bologna, which also bound individual acts of generosity into the responsibility of the collective, Lo Sport Fascista suggested that communes request 'spontaneous contributions from the population.'²⁰ Whether publicly or privately funded, the construction of sports facilities still needed to be regulated by the state if impractical stadia were to be avoided.

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¹⁶ ACS, PCM 1928-30, f.3.2.5. n.3344, circolare n.19, 18/8/27.
¹⁸ Ibid., p.2.
¹⁹ "I campi sportivi in Italia e la necessità di vigilare la costruzione", La Gazzetta, 18/4/30, p.3.
²⁰ "I campi sportivi comunali", Lo Sport Fascista, p.5.
Ultimately, the regime’s desire had not been to specifically develop athletics among the nation so much as establishing a culture of athleticism among the masses, which required the various provincial leaders to take an interest in all sports. Construction projects also carried additional benefits for the commune and the regime by significantly contributing to the alleviation of unemployment, in addition to improving the health of local citizens.

While the economic benefit had yet to reap its full dividend in 1929, according to Lo Sport Fascista it had already resulted in obvious improvements in the nation’s health:

Fascism did not create sport, but it knew how to create the mass of sportsmen [and] the athletic conscience in the Italian people. Tomorrow the sporting education of the population will be complete. You will see the communal sports grounds will have a use.

No doubt frustrated by inactivity in Tuscany, Il Bargello demanded that CONI intervene forcefully ‘among the sporting leaders of the provinces of Livorno, Lucca, Arezzo, Massa Carrara, Grosseto, Pisa and Pistoia to make understood, once and for all, that it is a pressing and unavoidable necessity, to give to athletics what has already been given to other sports’.

Interestingly, as this demand showed, there was no attempt to conceal the chronic shortage of facilities in Italy, even among those interested in sport. While fully publicising the dearth may have embarrassed the authorities into rectifying the problem to some degree, the deficit was also transformed into a political opportunity. The architect Paolo Vietti-Violi conveniently identified the source of the problem directly with the Liberal era: ‘Until a few years ago we still judged foreign stadiums, in Germany, France, and especially America... as insignificant works.’ However, a ‘more careful and intelligent education of the sporting mind has recognised the errors of the past’, and it was this change that began to result in stadiums superseding those that had formerly been the yardstick. One of the earliest examples was that of the ‘Società anonima Nafta’ in Genoa, created by Vietti-Violi himself. A multisport stadium, designed to blend in with the city’s hills, it accommodated football, athletics and cycling and proved to be one of the first of many such Fascist stadia built with an emphasis upon both practicality and style.

Despite the desperate need for new sports facilities, all construction projects now had to conform to a rigid set of guidelines as provided by the party secretary and the

22 Ibid., p.5.
commissioner of CONI.\(^\text{26}\) As *Lo Sport Fascista* demanded, it was time to end CONI’s consistent inability to impose these guidelines, which had resulted in the earlier approval and construction of new buildings that failed to refer to the ‘diverse technical norms that govern each sport.’\(^\text{27}\) Irregular shaped football pitches and running tracks were no longer acceptable if sport was to successfully serve the regime’s needs.

**Legislating for good taste**

Fascist sports buildings were not only works of beauty but also expressions of the athletic culture towards which the youth of Italy was being directed.\(^\text{28}\) By 1930 over 3,280 new sports grounds of all sizes and descriptions had risen to serve the variety of needy sporting organisations in over 2,000 communes, which included the ONB, OND, military and local communal groups. It was a stark contrast to the 1870 figure of zero\(^\text{29}\) and besides the sheer number there were also enough large showpiece stadia, by 1932, for Fascist Italy to make a successful bid to host the 1934 World Cup tournament.\(^\text{30}\)

Yet, despite the public drive to build stadia, if Italy was to ‘affirm its expertise in the architectural contest’\(^\text{31}\) De Finetti believed that the regime needed to implement the demands of the 1928 legislation more thoroughly throughout the country. In spite of the 3,280 new facilities, he argued that local rivalries and self-interest were still resulting in buildings that were falling below the established standards:

> Italy, which a few years ago seriously set about sporting competition and met with triumphal success, also needs to affirm its expertise in the architectural contest. Since 1928 Italy has possessed a far-sighted law, which imposes a severe technical preventative control on each new sports building. When this law is applied to the full and the stubborn resistance of local autonomies and ambitions gives way to the clear unity of intent that is the law, then the Olympic spirit...will also be able to clearly express itself in our architecture.\(^\text{32}\)

Superficially, De Finetti appeared to have over-exaggerated the extent of the problem, but despite the notable statistics there was still a dramatic disproportion between the provision of stadia in the north and south. An obvious example was the 39 separate facilities in the small Piedmont town of Vercelli that compared favourably with 38 in the huge

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\(^{26}\) ‘I campi sportivi in Italia...’, *Lo Sport Fascista*, p.3.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., p.3.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., p.3.


\(^{30}\) ‘Il Campionato del mondo 1933 assegnato all’unanimità all’Italia dal congresso di Zurigo’, *La Gazzetta*, 9/10/32, p.3.


\(^{32}\) Ibid., Prefazione.
metropolis of Naples.\textsuperscript{33} This disproportion accepted, De Finetti still drew attention to the need for quality in addition to quantity, which would reflect the aims of the regime.

In 1934 the PNF secretary and CONI president, Achille Starace, appointed a Commissione Impianti Sportivi (CIS) - Commission of Sports Facilities - under the auspices of the 1928 law, to determine the necessary technical and financial considerations for sporting works and to ensure their implementation. More than just a short-term body to compile a guidance document for the development or improvement of new and existing facilities, the Commission represented an attempt to address the problems that had restricted the 1928 law’s quality control. Acting as the ultimate standards watchdog, the CIS ensured that plans already approved by local bodies conformed to the established specifications. To address the issues in question, it was empowered to:

1. Approve the project, alone, from technical and financial points of view.
2. Approve part of the project and recommend necessary modifications.
3. Order additions, dimensional changes and general orders to be carried out.
4. Approve variations to the project sent after its first approval, or variations to already existing works.
5. Reject a project.
6. Carry out periodic checks, by one of its members, on works on progress. (The costs for each of the inspections are to be met completely by the body responsible for the work.)\textsuperscript{34}

These outlined duties of the CIS made it theoretically easier to impose both the construction norms that would guarantee sport’s continued vitality and development and the regime’s commitment to the design or aesthetic aspect of sports buildings. As highlighted in the preface of the CIS’s regolamento - regulation - the regime was interested in sports buildings from more than just the perspective of functionality:

\ldots each sporting work, from the most modest to the monumental, is always a potent and efficient method of propaganda. Thus it largely needs to satisfy not only the technical demands of who practices sport there, to encourage him to persevere in his noble work, but also the needs of the spectator.\textsuperscript{35}

Besides reasserting the regime’s desire to exploit sport as a means of propaganda, this statement interestingly emphasised both the importance of athletes and spectators, which was a clear progression from traditional thinking that had only been able to focus on the

\textsuperscript{33} F. Fabrizio, Sport e Fascismo. La Politica Sportiva del Regime 1924-1936, Guaraldi, Rimini-Firenze, 1976, p.23.
\textsuperscript{34} Archivio Storico del Comune di Firenze (ASCF), Belle Arti (BA) 115, Registro Generale (RG) 5711, CONI, Commissione Impianti Sportivi, 'Regolamento', Roma, 1934, p.8.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p.5.
apparently degenerative aspects of spectating. While it was necessary to create surroundings in which the athletes felt truly ‘at home’, to enable them to make the best of the new stadia, the CIS ruling determined that the seats, stairs, entrances, access streets etc, needed to be studied and resolved with care.\textsuperscript{36} As large crowds became increasingly regular features of football, this directive indicated the regime’s desire to increase its control over them and mass events. Although the behaviour of supporters had theoretically become the responsibility of the clubs themselves,\textsuperscript{37} this paternalistic concern for supporters’ welfare reflected the regime’s desire to protect and defend the wellbeing of organic society, even if this often amounted to protecting it from itself. Furthermore, it also signified the regime’s awareness that it was not only the athletes themselves who could be influenced by, or even contribute to, the development of its propaganda through sport, as the fans had a role too.

Despite the desire to adequately serve the needs of athletes and spectators, functionality, practicality and above all thrift, were the keystones of all new proposals, if unnecessary and avoidable economic and aesthetic excesses were to be prevented.

The norms detailed here have the scope to prevent useless fantasies and superfluous costs and serve at the same time to avoid the disadvantages of bad economic designs. For this reason it is established how the lay-out and construction of sports fields needs to be subject to statutory dimensions and systems, already tried by experience, so as not to condemn the athletes that train there, to inferior conditions.\textsuperscript{38} While no necessary equipment for particular sports was to have been sacrificed at the altar of economy, extras received scrupulous attention, especially as a clever semantic argument suggested that in reality they did not exist. They were either necessities or otherwise. This demanded that proposals for new stadia were accompanied by a detailed cost breakdown of individual pieces of equipment as part of an overall budget that guaranteed the project’s financing and completion.\textsuperscript{39}

Specific as these guidelines were, given the established norms derived from the experience of already completed projects, rather than imposing homogeneity upon Fascist stadia they instead allowed considerable room for manoeuvre. As will be seen, the enormous contrasts between the flagship stadiums of Bologna and Florence, completed within five years of each other, showed the considerable artistic licence permissible within stadia designed to represent the dynamism of the regime while facilitating athletic endeavour. The established norms of the CIS \textit{regolamento} were both considerable and technical, but do not demand point by point analysis for the purpose of this study. However, there are number of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid.}, p.6.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Zanetti & Tornabuoni, \textit{Il Giuoco del Calcio}, p.133.
\item \textsuperscript{38} CONI, Commissione Impianti Sportivi, ‘Regolamento’, pp.5-6.
\end{itemize}
aspects that shed further light upon the regime’s exploitation of sport, in the broadest sense possible, to further its propaganda needs.

The bare minimum established for any sports ground that included a football pitch or athletics track, was separate changing rooms for two teams and the referee, plus a public spectator area surrounding the ground with direct access from the street. According to the size of the project and in proportion to the needs and size of the respective organisation, there were also a variety of compulsory additional features. One of the ruling’s major concerns was the need for good communication links within the city and effective crowd control, which required an adequate number of ticket offices, entry points, stairs to access the terraces and differentiated seating areas.\(^{40}\)

No doubt in response to past errors and neglect, training facilities were also made a pre-requisite for any successful proposal, thereby reflecting the regime’s dual drive for both excellence and the development of physical exercise among mass society. It was an element deemed especially important for those cities with the worst conditions and the greatest masses,\(^{41}\) of which the regime wanted to ingratiate as many as possible into sport. To achieve this while taking account of the continuing growth of mass, urban society, all projects submitted to the Committee had to include a study for their potential expansion at some future point.

If the commissioning body, be it the commune or otherwise, decided upon a competition among architects and engineers to select the best entry, the CIS also held the right to approve the design brief and competition rules. Yet, while the *regolamento* was specific in what sports buildings and stadia should include and be designed to achieve, its aesthetic demands contained enough ambiguity to encourage creativity:

> The architecture of sporting works does not need to be an end in itself; but it does need to be clear, simple and characterised by the criteria of pure modernity. Every unnecessary decoration is to be avoided and the equivalent sum spent will be on improving the facilities and the field.\(^{42}\)

Once again the Commission was in the enviable position of having the full benefit of hindsight at its disposal. By studying already completed stadia, such as Bologna and Florence, it was able to ascertain that with the combination of skill, imagination and modern techniques, architects and engineers could produce dramatically diverse stadia that were still

\(^{39}\) Ibid., pp.10-11.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., p.15.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., p.10.

\(^{42}\) ACSF, ‘Regolamento’, p.12.
functional, economical and aesthetically avant-garde, while remaining comfortably within the regime’s bounds of acceptability. In fact, far from compromising Fascism, the apparent paradox of these stadia had already shown how their diverse artistic roots, which embraced both romaniità and modernism, could combine to form what was championed as its very own distinct style. Neither backward nor forward looking it represented the present, thereby responding to Mussolini’s earlier call for “‘a new art, an art for our times, a Fascist art’.”  

Thus, despite the underlying reasons that necessitated the new ruling, the Commission was keen not to repress creativity in the development of sporting architecture:

The path that this ruling renders obligatory, far from being put together in order to restrict planners, looks to benefit them, assuring them, in their ideas and studies, against the possibility of somebody overlooking those elements, in order that the completed project makes an effective contribution to the propaganda and sporting education for which it was created.  

Consequently, so long as their work conformed to the guidelines, planners, designers, engineers and architects were more than free. In fact, they were positively encouraged to express their creativity and imagination. First and foremost however, the rules dictated that stadia needed to be bi-functional: not just in the sense that they worked as training grounds for the sporting development of Italian youth, but also that they contained an aesthetic value. Given the number of large-scale stadia that had already been completed by 1934, the ruling could easily be interpreted as the regime slamming the door long after the horse had bolted. However, the artistic-license it provided suggests that, in fact, the regime neither intended nor desired to further impose itself, as its needs were already being well catered for. Apart from strengthening its grip on the localities, the limited nature of the changes in the 1934 regolamento, from the 1928 law, suggest it was more of an opportunity for Fascism to fully and more visibly associate itself with the rarity of a success story. In effect, rather than a radical attempt to fascistise the sporting landscape, the CIS gave an official stamp of approval to the various ideas, arguments, influences and designs that had been in public circulation for some time and had formed the theoretical foundations upon which almost all stadia were constructed under the regime. Without detracting from the positive sense of direction the ruling intended to impart, it is clear that rather than breaking from the past, the new set of norms was a synthesis of contemporary thought on how to derive the maximum benefit from all aspects of the explosion of sport and football.

44 ACSF, 'Regolamento', p.6.
**Architecture and Sport**

Stimulated by the regime’s interest and its commitment to construction, architects, engineers and journalists began to focus their attention upon the practical and aesthetic demands of modern stadia, thereby raising their level of importance in the process. Content to belong to the Fascist Syndicate and work for the party, the new generation of modernists and rationalists proclaimed themselves as the only true architects of the regime, in a pamphlet handed to Mussolini at the beginning of the Second Italian Exhibition of Rationalist Architecture in 1931. “Old architects are an emblem of impotence that will not do.... Our movement has no other moral mission than that of serving the Revolution in hard times”.45

Naturally, the design and construction of stadia was only one aspect of the general contemporary architectural debate under Fascism that resulted in an expanding number of journals and magazines, one example of which was *Quadrante*. Formed in 1933 by a group of architects and edited by art critic Pier Maria Bardi, the monthly intended to bring some clarity to Italian architecture that it believed had become a mass of confusing and often contradictory terms. As part of this process, the magazine’s founders were intent on ‘affirming - in the heart of European rationalism - a definite, coherent and uncompromising Italian style’ that would be founded on rationalism.46 Such Italian rationalism would be an affirmation of “classicism” and “mediterraneanism” - designed in spirit; and not in form or folklore - in contrast with the “nordism” or “baroquism” or with the “arbitrary romanticism” of the new European architecture’.47

While the journal opposed ‘foreign tendencies’, it did so without excluding the study of foreign trends and ideas, all of which contributed to its construction or reinforcement of national identity through architecture.48 This was evident in *Quadrante*’s programme that reflected the debates and issues that had been raging within Italian architecture for some time. As the modernist architect Pier Luigi Nervi argued: ‘The works that we carry out are not only the face of our society, but also mirror our spirit and ability: a lasting mirror and face that the future generations will pass judgement on. Thus, how is it possible, not to be bothered by it?”49

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46 ‘Un Programma d’Architettura’, *Quadrante*, May 1933, p.5.
49 P.L. Nervi, ‘Problemi dell’Architettura’, *Casabella*, May 1933, p.34.

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One of Italy’s most adventurous architects, Nervi believed that it was not so much the quality of the materials that were most significant in a building’s construction, but more ‘the spirit, the aesthetic idea and static quality with which the elements are composed and proportioned.’ While reflecting many of his already significant contributions to the Fascist landscape, most dramatically the ‘Giovanni Berta’ stadium in Florence, his comments also stressed the important role of architecture in the development and construction of football stadia, if they were to adequately represent the regime. Despite the importance of monumental projects, both big and small stadia featured regularly in almost all architectural magazines and journals of the era, as professionals grappled with the difficulties of accommodating the diverse and sometimes contradictory demands of sport and Fascism.

The Fascist interpretation of sport, which was essentially preoccupied with ‘movement and speed’, led G. Barbero to proclaim that those who ‘are interested in it, even if only from the architectural point of view, have been caught in the mechanism; and in their projects they cannot fail to reflect on the impressive images of the athlete’s sprint, the speed of the machine, or of the togetherness of the crowd’. His thoughts appeared in La Città Nuova, Pippo Oriani’s fortnightly dedicated to modernist, futurist architecture, art and design, which was established to help those artists, architects, painters, decorators and sculptors working in the ‘avant-garde artistic atmosphere that is imposing itself throughout the world’. While the relationship between Futurist ideas, sport, speed and athleticism was certainly still novel, if not exactly new, the most interesting aspect of Barbero’s idea was his appreciation of the role of the crowd, which was certainly a group to which the regime and Futurist architecture responded with gusto. As Barbero added: ‘Futurist sporting architecture that is occupied by sport as spectacle, is working for the game and the crowd. When the game becomes a passionate spectacle it is because the public has made it so.’

As already discussed, the motives behind Fascism’s investment in all aspects of sport were twofold: to develop the physical fitness of the nation and to produce the champions that it believed would constitute strong diplomatic currency and a source of positive propaganda. However, the regime was not alone in its interest in sport during this period, as the rebirth of the Olympic Games had stimulated other countries and cities to create sports zones, as in Amsterdam and Los Angeles. Although similar to the Littorale’s multisport concept in

50 Ibid., p.34.
53 Ibid., p.4.
Bologna, they nonetheless differed due to the Futurist/modernist appreciation of the importance of the crowd. As Barbero observed:

> the development of sports architecture runs parallel to the development of recreation and the rising passion of the crowd completes it when it reaches that synchronised zenith that assimilates the athletes in the race, the machine, the mass and its cry. From this moment of dynamism rises the creature of the arts, they rise, those constructions that are thought to indulge the sporting impulse.... Architecture passes from the built stadium to something more intensely planned that ties the sensibilities of the artist-architect to that of the crowd, the sprint of the athlete, the speed of the machine, to the plasticity of the mass.\(^{54}\)

Despite the growing international interest in sport, nowhere was this interpretation better demonstrated than in Fascist Italy where a number of futuristic multisport stadia had risen to critical acclaim by the mid 1930s. Further legitimising the regime and cementing Mussolini’s reputation for fulfilling promises, Barbero acclaimed the sport zones’ contribution to Fascist society as equalling those created for traffic, the military and study.\(^{55}\) From the smallest sporting constructions, such as the *Case di Balilla* - youth clubs\(^{56}\) - to the monumental, all contributed to the creation of the Fascist present and were portrayed as guarantees of the regime’s ability to deliver its promises for the future. More than just trying to engender a love of sport, the construction of big and small stadia helped the government project a positive image of the nation, although this could not be achieved at any cost. As one government memorandum noted, the creation of sports grounds and monumental stadiums might have been useful for national dignity and good for propaganda, but only when they did not weigh too heavily on the already stretched finances and did not encourage exhibitionism.\(^{57}\) As Renato Ricci, head of the ONB, argued, these new stadia complimented the type of society that the regime was attempting to construct through the promotion of sport: ‘It is a question of developing the physical culture of the collective more precisely, ordering it in a way to get greater efficiency and to form a new mentality...that could be precious without being of great financial cost.’\(^{58}\)

Besides Bologna and Florence, two of Fascism’s most impressive and significant sports construction projects were located in Turin and Rome. Work on Turin’s Stadio Mussolini began in 1931 and was completed the following year, within ‘a remarkable


\(^{57}\) ACS, PCM 1928-30, f.3.2.5. n.33125. Memorandum, 15/11/28, p.2.

days' according to Casabella. Conforming to the multisport concept, the stadium provided facilities for football, rugby (*palla ovale*), athletics and swimming. Deliberately built in the city outskirts with good communication links and room for future expansion beyond its 65,000-spectator capacity, its oval shaped design was said to ensure the best views from whatever part of the ground. Access, organisation and safety had also been carefully planned, right down to the staircases made from anti-slip stone.

An example of rational modernism, the Stadio Mussolini was completed in time to host the 1933 Italian student games, De Finetti recording it as having shown off the brilliance of Italian Fascist architecture. Despite the stadium’s strict budget, *La Gazzetta* was still able to stress ‘its great architectural conception and its vivid expression of modernity’, which was again achieved by combining the mantras of simplicity and functionality. Built principally in reinforced concrete with its structural elements left deliberately exposed, the building was another startling and original example of Italian architectural and engineering progress.

Dominating the principal entrance to the forecourt was the free standing 40-metre high, reinforced concrete Marathon tower, with ‘Stadio Mussolini’ emblazoned on the front aspect. Similar to the tower in Florence, it also contained a glass façade that was illuminated by night, from the inside, for the entire city to see. Decoration was minimal with only a subtle use of colour. According to *La Gazzetta*, the juxtaposition of marble and granite was also intended to ‘underline and accentuate the building, perfecting the black and white of the façade’, which created a ‘solemn and powerful’ effect that resulted from the ‘good balance between occupied and empty space’. Being named the ‘Stadio Mussolini’ was an honour in itself, bestowed upon only the worthiest buildings. Many others, such as the stadium completed in Naples in 1934 that requested permission as an expression of the ‘city’s profound recognition of the Duce’, were not deemed worthy enough for the ‘honour’.

The Turin stadium resembled that of Florence, which was not so surprising given that the young architect responsible was Raffaello Fagnoni who had been based in the Florentine Scuola Superiore d’architettura, under the supervision of the famous Giovanni Michelucci. Reflecting the dynamic, modernist style of such stadia in Fascist Italy, *La Gazzetta*’s critic

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60 Ibid., p.26.
61 De Finetti, *Stadi. Esempi*, p.73, refers to praise from respected German architects regarding more than one aspect of the stadium’s design.
63 ‘Lo Stadio Littorio…’, *La Gazzetta*, p.5.
observed how Fagnoni had managed to create something intrinsically original by blending local traditions with modern day construction and design techniques. 'With this new building that rises in Turin, the architect Fagnoni knew...how to make an original work without returning to designs, at the cost of what might amount to an antique or a modern imitation.'

So important was the general stadium-construction programme, of which the Stadio Mussolini was only one part, that it was exported beyond the mainland and into the colonies. Here, it was hoped that stadia might exploit both indigenous and imported cultures of sport to help project Fascist civilisation upon the colonial regions, as a method of Italianisation. Following the export of football to Tripoli, La Nazione reported how the increasing interest of expatriates and locals made the original, adapted sports ground inadequate for 'such a dignified and modern city.' Stimulated by examples in the motherland, the Tripoli municipal administration ceded an area of land plus L.500,000 to secure the rapid construction of a new stadium. According to a government memorandum, this was for the athletic and military preparation of the youth, not to mention the excitement of the crowd: 'The stadium will be completely equipped for all athletic games, and will be one of the best gyms for the physical education of those youths living in the Colony.'

Despite giving his skills free of charge, the engineer Bono was still required to design a stadium that possessed 'architecturally strong Roman lines...worthy of the new fascist Tripoli', which was an obvious effort to both affirm and further Italianise the land's new identity. The regime's interventions in physical education and football were partly stimulated by its concern for the future health of the nation and the game. However, the issue of stadium design illustrated the contradictions of an eclectic 'ideology' that consistently linked itself with its Roman past while professing the merits of modernity at its most extreme. In this way, stadia were expected to project the regime's modern and imperial inspiration that was an integral part of Fascist Italy's new identity.

**Roman stadia in Fascist cities**

While Fascism deliberately sought to rebuild the former glory of Imperial Rome and legitimise its rule through a constructed mythology connecting the two, its building

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66 Ibid., p.5.
67 'Uno studio per le manifestazioni sportive a Tripoli,' La Nazione, 14/8/30, p.6.
68 ACS, PCM 1928-30, f.3.2.5. n.33125, Memorandum, 15/11/28, p.6.
69 Ibid., p.6.
programme for large sporting works and stadia also logically referred to Ancient Greece. In fact, the modern Italian sporting incarnations drew much inspiration from both the Roman and Greek Empires in which ancient sport reached its apogee. As the architect and designer Silvio San Pietro has identified, the ancient gymasia were ‘the architectural basis of the later stadia and hippodromes’.

The original stadia in Ancient Greece, such as one of the greatest sporting cities Olympia, possessed only one stand/colonnade for spectators. Positioned parallel to the length of the field and running track, it was designed to protect spectators’ eyes from the direct sun. It endured for the first 13 ancient Olympic tournaments, but was eventually superseded by a larger playing field and running track with two straights and one curve. Three quarters of what we would nowadays associate with an athletics track, it ensured the best views of the action for all spectators. So successful was it that the design was replicated in the Athens ‘Panathenaea’ stadium, built in 1896 to celebrate the first modern Olympic Games.

Founded in 776 BC. the one day Olympian Games were repeated every four years, relatively unchanged, until 472 BC. when the contest was expanded to include more events over five days. Despite the strong Greek influence, many aspects of the ancient Games and stadia were still replicated in the modern Fascist era. The ancient Greek pursuit of sport and physical perfection was associated with a form of paganism, which some Fascists later decried as too narcissistic. Despite these pagan links, religion and sport were not necessarily rivals and one of the most interesting features of the Greek structural landscape was the way in which stadia and sports facilities were often placed in close proximity to buildings dedicated to spiritual pursuits. Gymnasia, porticoes, basilicas and temples were often found in comfortable cohesion, such as Olympia, where the original stadium in the Cronos hills was also maintained as a consecrated site.

So popular was spectator sport that ancient stadia also needed to be able to cope with vast crowds, which was probably the single most important stimulus in their continual development and evolution. Entrances and exits for spectators, that were originally limited to one single point, were increased to accommodate the vast crowds going to Rome’s ‘Circo

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72 G. De Finetti, ‘Stadi antichi e moderni’, Casabella, December 1933, p.2.
73 De Finetti, Stadi. Esempi, pp.15-16.
Massimo’, which was also styled upon the Greek hippodrome. Once sporting events began to change from races into physical contests, the Romans abandoned the old rectangular styled stadium and blended it with that of the Greek theatre, to produce an intrinsically Roman venue: the circular arena or amphitheatre. With terraces surrounding the central field of play, gladiatorial spectacles that were contested here as opposed to athletic competition. Inspired by the cult of strength, rather than athletic beauty, the ensuing battles between both man and man, and man and beast, were thought to have demonstrated the strength of Rome, although many argued the opposite. In fact it was the crowd’s hunger for such spectacles and the ensuing ‘collective madness’ that fuelled the belief that such gladiatorial contests had contributed to the Empire’s decadence and decline.

While ancient Greek stadia were always built next to the big cities the Romans located them in the most beautiful parts of central localities, thereby enabling easy access for citizens and creating a strong bond between the arena and the city. However, in time, practicalities rather than preference restricted them to the suburbs where, as De Finetti explained, they could still become an integral part of city life:

...it is only as a prominent building in a settled urban landscape that the stadium becomes that “secular assembly” that the ancients undoubtedly wanted and that we contemporaries would justly want to create; there it can become a focus of life no less than the theatres and the buildings dedicated to the arts. Only a mental apathy can be hostile to the urban idea of the ancients.74

Such strong relationships that developed between the cities, citizens and arenas/stadiums in ancient Rome and Verona, were something that 1930s contemporary planners were keen to replicate in the new wave of Fascist construction.

As ‘masters of spherical design...[and]...severely rationalist architects’, De Finetti observed the Romans optimum methods of crowd control through the use of multiple entry points, internal staircases and graduated terracing.75 It was these logical and effective examples of how to organise the masses that were employed in many modern stadia; most notably that of Turin in 1933. Elsewhere, in Philadelphia for example, the old Greek ‘U’ shaped model was also enlarged and grafted onto a semi-amphitheatre to produce a hybrid stadium. As San Pietro has explained:

Today’s stadiums vary little in design from their original classical counterparts. In many cases, the modern stadium derives directly from the classical Greek arrangement on two parallel sections squared off at one end and linked by a curved section at the other.... Others draw on the elliptical shape of Roman amphitheatres, or even the circular form.76

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74 Ibid., pp.22-23.
75 ‘Stadi antichi...’, Casabella, p.3.
Not only did these adjustments make the playing field large enough to host both football and baseball matches, the crowd was also organised upon ancient Roman principles as opposed to ancient Greek. Rome’s Flaminio and PNF stadiums, opened in 1911 and 1928, Bologna’s Littorale, in 1927, and the 1933 Stadio Mussolini in Turin, all showed the diverse ways in which the architecture of the Imperial past was adapted and brought to life in the Fascist present.

In addition to these stadia, Farnesina and the Foro Mussolini in Rome formed one of the most high profile examples of a sports facility that blended this Imperial tradition and Fascist modernity. It was a perfect demonstration of the Fascist concept of *bonifica* (reclamation) that could refer to the restoration of swampland to constructive use or the more allegorical regeneration of society, whereby bad weeds were torn up and the soil regenerated.\(^{77}\) The Farnesina and Foro Mussolini projects were launched following a land-reclamation programme, in 1928, to rid the banks of the Tiber of perpetual stagnant water at the foot of the Monte Mario, where the Blackshirts had camped before the March on Rome.\(^{78}\) Not only a showpiece example of the regime’s dynamic regeneration of the city’s useless land into productive areas, the project exemplified how Fascism intended to transform the city and Italy as a whole by juxtaposing Roman classicism with its own revolutionary beliefs, thereby creating an identity of its own. As Vittorio Orazi perfectly described in *La Città Nuova*: ‘After Caesar’s Rome, Papal Rome, here is Rome of Fascist Italy.’\(^{79}\)

The complex’s position alone was dramatic enough, but this was augmented by a tall white marble obelisk, dedicated to Mussolini, that confronted visitors as they crossed the river. It marked the entry to the forum that began at the via Piazzale dell’Impero, a marble walkway decorated with Roman style mosaics of sporting scenes and huge tablets of stone engraved with Fascist mottoes celebrating the principal moments in the history of Italy and the movement. Later integrated into the Foro Mussolini, the Farnesina complex included the Stadio dei Cipressi - Cypress stadium - indoor and outdoor swimming pools, tennis courts, a dance theatre and the open air training centre known as the Stadio dei Marmi - Marble Stadium. Intended to form the foundation of Italy’s bid for the 1944 Olympic Games, the area did provide a vast amount of facilities for the Rome Olympics of 1960.

\(^{77}\) Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, p.4.
\(^{78}\) Ades, Benton etc, *Art and Power*, p.125.
One of the many architects who worked on the entire project was Enrico Del Debbio, whose design for the Academy and the Marble stadium [see Appendix I, Figs. 3] was another unsubtle juxtaposition of modernity and antiquity, which San Pietro has succinctly described:

The architecture of the completed complex is charged with moral values and rhetorical content that are expressed by a successful synthesis of the modern and the classical, of 'novecentismo' (modernism) and metafisica (metaphysics).... Del Debbio manages to give a relatively small structure a certain degree of balanced monumentality. Along the top of the marble terraces...there are sixty white Hercules that were donated by various Italian provinces. These veritable mute athletes today serve as a sculptural crown to the arena, but at the time they were also seen as a direct metaphor of virility and strength, educational emblems for the Regime’s young sportmen.^[see Appendix I, Figs. 4&5]

Despite the indulgent statues, the stadium’s aesthetics were nonetheless restricted to a decorative minimum, while its marriage of old and new concepts further indicated the regime’s comfort with unavoidably strong Greek influences. Recognising this, the contemporary architect and designer of the PNF stadium Marcello Piacentini, defined the whole complex as: “a modern version of the ancient gymnasion [...] a great stage for upright growth [...] (a synthesis) of all the characteristics of what is perennially Roman [...] (which can also) offer an example of Greek beauty in its chastely naked buildings”.'^91 As a description of the Stadio dei Marmi’s sculptures and many of the stadia constructed under Fascism - such as the fully exposed skeletons of the supermodels of Turin and Florence that broke provocatively with tradition - ‘chaste nudity’ perfectly encapsulated the relationship between the classical past and the daring future that resulted in the immaculate conception of the Fascist present.

As La Gazzetta proudly noted at the time, the stadium was ‘inspired by the artistic principles of ancient Rome’ and showed ‘its opulence in the abundance of the marble’.^82 The specific use of marble was also representative of more than just the self-indulgence of a spendthrift architect. Cut from the Tuscan mountains at Carrara, it demonstrated the regime’s autarchic preference for building with nationally and, if possible, locally produced materials. Besides stamping an Italian identity on stadia, it also assisted their rapid integration into local communities by making a huge impact upon their economies. In the case of the Stadio dei Marmi, marble was deliberately chosen for the terracing and statues in order to make an impact on the eye that was impossible to ignore. As La Gazzetta boasted, in the full rays of the sun the literally blinding stadium showed itself to be a ‘triumph of the most classical

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80 Ibid., p.309.
82 ‘Foro Mussolini sorto a Roma per realizzare l’educazione fisica totalitaria’, La Gazzetta, 3/11/32, p.3.
simplicity’ that resulted from ‘the materials used and the essential elements that compose it: the terraces, the great curve, the statues, and the marble’.83

The blinding whiteness of buildings was a prominent feature of stadia and Fascist architecture in general, even if it was not always economically viable or aesthetically desirable to reproduce this effect with marble. In fact, many new stadia, as will be seen in the case of the Giovanni Berta in Florence, were constructed entirely from reinforced concrete that, in strong daylight, appeared to be white, almost of marble. This ‘whiteness’ was a consistent feature of the myth of the new vitality of Fascist life that architecture was intended to symbolise.

One of the most important architectural contributions to the creation of such Fascist mythology was to have been the Universal Exhibition (EUR 42), which should have opened in Rome in 1942. As one of the regime’s largest and most ambitious building projects that was intended to physically record the era for future centuries,84 EUR’s most distinctive feature was the use of lighting to project the new Fascist civilisation. It was, as Emilio Gentile has observed, an indication of how ‘white architecture symbolised the triumph of the Mediterranean sun, [and] was intended to represent fascism’s victory over fate in future centuries’.85

Not surprisingly this architectural style also featured among many of the new stadia that were honing and inspiring the future generations. In the Giovanni Berta the prominent Marathon Tower was illuminated at night, while in the Stadio dei Marmi broad daylight provided more than enough energy to effectively reflect its message. Despite being a relatively modest sized arena, the connection between the past, present and the future was made more through the intensity of the stadium’s design and its statues than anything monolithic, which proved to be more the exception than the rule. Driven by the modernist architectural movement, monumental buildings, which included stadia, quickly became an imposing feature of Mussolini’s cityscapes. In Fascist Italy size certainly did matter and as the popularity of calcio continued to grow, so stadia also needed to expand if the masses were to be comfortably accommodated and efficiently organised.

Despite the regime’s clear affection for its Imperial roots, every aspect of its investment in sport was intended to develop and impose an identity of its own, albeit one that

83 Ibid., p.6.
85 Ibid., p.246.
often referred to its Roman heritage. Nonetheless, however practical and well-designed ancient sporting facilities might have been, their mere adaptation was not enough to adequately represent the new regime. To effectively achieve this, new stadia and sports facilities had to contain ground-breaking design aspects. Besides displaying the melange of Fascism’s ancient roots and its futuristic influences, these stadia also needed to reflect the Fascist city’s new, regenerative and vibrant role in the life of the urban mass. This opened the window of opportunity to primarily modernist architects who preferred to concentrate on the present and the future, rather than draw heavily on the past.

The huge importance of modern, urban, city centres resulted in a vast number of development competitions and projects throughout the Fascist period. Although only a minority ever progressed beyond the planner’s dream, they usually reflected the regime’s desire to correct the errors of the past while stamping its own identity on the present. According to an editorial in La Città Nuova, while there were still ‘too many people in Italy that had not understood the importance of architecture and art’, they contrasted directly with ‘those young and capable artists that [we]re willingly providing Fascist Italy with works worthy of the time’. 86 Apparently uninspired by the aesthetic, it was these artists responses to the nation’s radically renovated spirit that would finally overcome ‘neo-classicism and all the horrible false modernities that deface cities today’. 87 According to Pippo Oriani, such futuristic ideals were a direct response to previous styles of architecture and city organisation that had produced solitary buildings that, in the best case scenario, were ‘isolated solutions without the rapport of continuity or organic unity’ with the rest of the city. 88 More than just castigating many of Liberal Italy’s building projects, his remark outlined the new Fascist vision for modern cities in which community was of paramount importance. To ensure cities were restructured along these new Fascist lines, all were instructed to draw up a redevelopment plan, as Oriani explained:

The regulatory plans provide for the demolition of the complicated and intricate old road layouts and, with the opening of new arteries adapted to the present day’s traffic, they will stipulate the reconstruction according to the concept of the mass (totalitarian vision) and never the single building (fragmented vision). The totalitarian vision of the city thus held, is of a living organism for which the districts represent the living cells. 89

87 Ibid., p.1.
89 Ibid., p.1.
His interpretation of the idealised, modern, Fascist city complimented the regime’s organic vision of society, whereby individuals constituted the living cells of the greater being. Modern city centres were to contain the general buildings for public life, such as banks and offices, in addition to the entertainment/party centres of the Case Littorio and the Case di Balilla. De Finetti claimed these were among ‘the most valuable creations of the new Italy. The organisation of these young energies not only creates the athletes of tomorrow, but it also creates that popular spirit that will be seen in the stadiums…as used to be seen in the theatres of yesterday.’90 In these city centres that had been subjected to the greatest ‘horrors’ of the past, buildings completely unsuited to the harmony of the modern city were targeted for demolition to make way for more modernistic structures that reflected the new political age. One such attempt was Via Roma in Turin, however its failure, apparently due to ‘invalid re-designs, public adversity…[plus].clear and intelligent attacks by critics and artists’, was considered a grave threat to the future of Fascist civilisation by the architect Fillia.91 Coincidentally, a similar plan for Bologna’s Via Roma also failed to mature.92

If the city centres were to house public life buildings the peripheries would contain the more practical and productive needs, such as accommodating the industrial districts and the associated mass workforce. For this reason, the suburbs became a natural and practical site for the Dopolavoro gymnasia, sports fields, stadia etc.

Despite the need for sports buildings, whether privately or publicly funded they still represented a spiritual and political expression of the country, which had to be reflected in their design. Consequently, Pippo Oriani believed it was no longer appropriate, even absurd, to imitate previous eras in contemporary structures that had a completely different function to those of the past: ‘Fortunately in Italy the renovating gust of aesthetic architecture, spiritually tied to our political system, has made itself felt with achievements of great importance. Sports stadia and youth clubs are at the avant-garde of all other constructions.’93

So politically important were buildings that simple progress alone was not enough for more intransigent urban critics that demanded they become an integrated part of Fascist Italy’s urban renewal programme. Unfortunately, as Oriani illustrated, local dynamics and desires continued, on occasion, to produce structures that appeared to refer back to the democratic past:

90 De Finetti, Stadi. Esenpi, p.81.
It is absurd that the modernity of a construction might often depend upon the taste of a local leader and not on the rationale of constructive continuity. Hence, you see stations, post offices, youth clubs, potent futurist creations, open to the most innovative winds of change - and you see public administration buildings that seem to have risen to the monumental memory of democracy. A stylistic discipline in construction is urgent and necessary.

La Città Nuova continued its rage against architecture that failed to reflect the new political order with an attack upon even those existing buildings that showed some promise, but were 'stupidly diminished by nineteenth century and neo-classical pictures, and sculptures of an idiotic and anti-virile primitivism. It is time for the architects to understand that only the futurist model is coherent with new buildings. One example of decorative misuse was the 'outdated' offices of the big banks that were adorned by ornamental motifs that promoted their institutions as much as they offended contemporary political sensibilities. However, decoration was not completely discouraged as the regime exploited symbols to construct and impose its identity and authority. Besides the intrinsic political value of reasserting visual images of Fascism, their reproduction was further encouraged to help paper over the past, as Oriani explained. 'Beyond everything, being in daily contact with the masses, public buildings have a social, moral and educational function: therefore it is not enough just to constructively renovate them, but it has to be done with the adoption of decorations.'

Even for sports facilities, symbols, art and the aesthetic were not always surplus to requirements. In fact, so keen was CONI for the regime to give a good account of itself at the Berlin Olympics, it launched a competition to encourage artists and sculptors to turn their attention 'towards the actors and the spectacles of the modern sporting activity'. Used correctly, aesthetic decoration was clearly acceptable as an instrument of domestic and foreign propaganda, as visible in most of the stadia constructed by the regime.

While the aesthetic was clearly being politicised in order to serve the needs of the regime, architectural polemics still continued to rage. One occurred in the wake of Marcel Breuer's discussion of the relationship between politics and architecture in Casabella. He suggested that the architect's political background, whether he was a member of the Fascist syndicate or not, for example, was less important than his development of the best possible

93 'Architettura', La Città Nuova, p.1.
94 'Intransigenza', La Città Nuova, p.1.
95 Ibid., p.1.
96 'Architettura', La Città Nuova, p.1.
solutions to construction problems. Thus, Breuer argued: ‘a Fascist can build the palace of Soviets in Moscow, a communist the Mole Littoria in Rome, just as the car manufacturer sells his vehicles without a care for the political colour of his client.’

Describing his ideas as brilliant for their ‘absence of sane political sense’, Giuseppe Pagano argued that Breuer’s critics in Regime Fascista had also failed to understand the relationship between politics and architecture, having placed too much importance on the political aspect. In his opinion, a balance needed to be struck between the two as merely a political perspective could not resolve artistic problems. What counted was ‘the work and the artistic sensibility’ and not just the political leanings of the creator, as ‘Membership of the Fascist Syndicate or the Moscow Soviet of architects does not have the magic to transform a violinist into a genius’. He was suggesting that membership of the Fascist syndicate alone could not bludgeon an architect into producing aesthetically and politically acceptable buildings.

If membership of the Fascist syndicate did not necessarily guarantee the creation of an acceptable work of art, the role of buildings as visual representations of the regime equally reduced the importance of an individual’s membership of the official architectural body in relation to their work. In the same way that self-censorship meant that control of the press was less severe than in other dictatorships, so architects’ sensitivities and responses to the demands of Fascism reduced the need for a more intense scrutiny of their work. As Berghaus has observed: ‘An official attitude of loyalty was the most they were asked to demonstrate; whatever they thought and said in private was of little interest to the functionaries.’

Yet even among Fascist deputies ferocious debates continued as to what exactly the needs of the regime were and if they might be better served by modernistic tendencies from outside of Italy, or by the example of the Roman past. One such debate in the Chamber of Deputies focussed on the proposals for the new railway station in Florence and the Casa Littoria, the intended home of Fascism, to be built in Rome. In protest at what he saw as ‘Teutonic tendencies’, the Roman Member of Parliament Francesco Giunta suggested that:

to build the Casa Littoria well, it should be enough for us to look at our heart. (vivacious applause) In certain cases membership of the Party does not say anything. We do not need to end up with the import of anything from other people too distant from us in origin, spirit or tradition.

99 Ibid., p.2.
100 Ibid., p.3.
101 Ibid., p.3.
102 Berghaus, Futurism and Politics, p.233.
103 ‘Dalla Seduta del 20-V-XII, Casabella, June 1934, p.3.
However, the openly aggressive attack by those protesting against modern architecture, as led by the former party secretary Roberto Farinacci, only turned Mussolini against them and provoked him into slightly clarifying his position.

On 10 June 1934, within two weeks of the Chamber’s discussion, Mussolini demonstrated his satisfaction with the progeny from the marriage of politics and art by inviting a number of young architects to Rome. According to *Casabella* the reception, which included the group of designers for the new and lauded Florence station, was intended to express the ‘pleasure and applause, that he..[Mussolini]..wanted to extend to the young that seek to realise in architecture and other fields, an art responsive to the sensibility and the needs of our fascist century’. Deliberately disseminated throughout the national press for the benefit of prefects, mayors and local dignitaries, his words were supposed to finally clarify the matter.

Under the headline ‘Mussolini salva l’architettura Italiana’ (Mussolini saves Italian architecture), Pagano triumphantly proclaimed the modernist victory: ‘Modern architecture has now become State art.... modern architects have been officially invested with a great, historic responsibility.’ For the regime that fully exploited the potential of the visual image to recreate the past and project visions of the future in the present, artists of all description were expected to play an integral role in establishing and maintaining its identity and authority. It was a role that Pagano believed had been handed to modern architects by Mussolini’s speech, enabling them to now openly fulfil their responsibilities as society’s guides and leaders.

Despite such an apparently conclusive statement from the Duce, it has to be recognised that the regime never subscribed to any specific style in its entirety. Fascism was too practical for this. While there was a clear preference for modernism, Mussolini was astute enough not to confine the regime to rigidly applied artistic norms. In reality, he was more interested in seeing the emergence of works of art that best represented Fascism, whatever their origins and inspiration. As Ruth Ben-Ghiatt has identified in Fascist culture as whole, this not only encouraged inspirational competition among intellectuals seeking legitimacy in their work, it also ‘allowed those that did not openly identify themselves as fascists to participate in the public initiatives of the regime’.

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Although clearly absorbed by past influences on stadium design, De Finetti was one modernist whose ideas reflected the way the ancient and even futuristic could be drawn together in a radical representation of the present. Uninterested in merely extolling the virtues of Fascist Italy’s Roman ancestry, he was also keen to learn from positive and negative past experiences so as to avoid repeating previous errors; such as football and sports grounds with no practice facilities. As part of a framework to ensure that new stadia met modern needs, Paolo Vietti-Violi stressed the importance of first defining ‘the different aims, the technical and sporting characteristics and even the eventual secondary needs that might initially seem to be of little importance, but later have their own real value’.108

No doubt with one eye on Fascism’s Roman heritage, an overriding theme of Vietti-Violi’s general appraisal of the complete planning process for new stadia was the creation of order and control among spectators, while ensuring they became physically and perhaps psychologically integrated into the city. This is not to suggest that his plan was specifically designed to control the amorphous masses of modernity that Fascism feared and fed off in equal measure, but there can be no doubt that modern stadia with an enhanced capacity to control crowds would have been embraced by the regime.

In fact, the concepts of Vietti-Violi and his contemporaries who had already expressed similar ideas, were the result of good sense and forethought for which Italian football still owes a debt of gratitude. To improve crowd control they focussed their attention on the physical location of stadia, arguing that they were best suited to city extremities. Not only effective at the time, it also facilitated their redevelopment to accommodate the demands of the modern game with far greater ease than many built in the industrial centres of England. Consequently, if they were to be suburban but not isolated from the masses and the city centres, infrastructure was a key issue. This accounted for the crucial attention that had to be paid to public transport and the improvement of access roads for any successful project. Another reaction to the demands of modernity was the need for parking facilities to accommodate the increasing amount of private vehicles that Vietti-Violi suggested would be best controlled by a one way system around the ground. Within the stadiums, he proposed large and clearly signed entry points with turnstiles corresponding to the different sections of the ground to assist the efficient control of ticketing and the movement of spectators; all of

which reinforced and reflected the regime’s culture of collective discipline. Once again, many of his ideas were a logical application of Roman planning to serve modern needs.

Vietti-Violi’s simple and logical ideas on planning stadia drew attention to the way in which the needs of sports facilities had begun to extend beyond the event itself. As the number of spectators grew, so did their importance to the regime. This was reflected in the nature of the stadium-construction programme that went beyond just providing facilities for athletes and spectators alike. In fact, there is a convincing argument that the regime saw an opportunity in the massive growth of spectator sport to do more than simply provide comfort, safety and style in sports stadia. There was also the chance to control and direct the masses that were absorbed by the football fever.

Crowds, masses and the collective mind

Hitler and Mussolini believed that ‘the road to power lay through the mastery of collective psychology, the manipulation of mass passions’. Mussolini particularly subscribed to Gustave Le Bon’s thesis - *The Crowd - A Study of the Popular Mind* - that ‘he applied and developed with unquestionable ability’, according to the historian Alberto Asor Rosa. Le Bon essentially argued that by understanding the inherently violent, destructive nature of crowds, politicians in particular could become the mentors of the masses. While his arguments were primarily designed to negate the threat of revolutionary crowds towards the established political elite, they were also interpreted as a positive way of controlling and directing the energies of such masses.

In the 1940s Emil Lederer argued that it was just such an amorphous mass, dislocated from traditional Italian society by the catastrophic forces of war and modernity that ultimately turned to Fascism. It is a persuasive if far from conclusive theory. However, despite the failure to adequately consider other contributory factors in the collapse of Italian democracy, the argument was generally appreciated among the PNF and its intellectual supporters. What was beyond question was Mussolini’s desire and ability to exploit and mobilise the amorphous masses that Le Bon had identified.

As the chief synthesiser of all that had thus far constituted research into crowd behaviour, Le Bon defined a crowd in the ordinary sense of the word, as a gathering of

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individuals, irrespective of nationality, profession, sex, or the circumstances that brought them together. His psychological definition of the crowd identified quite different characteristics, for under certain conditions he believed the collective’s behaviour differed considerably from that of the individuals that composed it. The ideas and sentiments of the collective became one and the same, overpowering the conscious personality of the individual.\footnote{Le Bon, \textit{The Crowd}, p.23.} This core tenet of his argument suggested that once in a large group, people ceased to behave as individuals capable of exercising their own rational judgement and thereby became subject to the ‘law of the mental unity of crowd’. Irrespective of their occupation, character or intelligence, once among the crowd individuals assumed the collective mind and began to feel, think and act in a completely different manner to when they were alone.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p.27.} By nature, any individual becoming part of a crowd also lost the power of reasoning while gaining a sense of strength from the anonymity of submersion within the mass.

Besides the forces of immersion and anonymity, Le Bon also believed that contagion and suggestibility further defined the behaviour of mass groups. Classifying it as a hypnotic order, he suggested the crowd’s every sentiment and act was ‘contagious, and contagious to such a degree that every individual readily sacrifices his personal interest to the collective interest.’\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p.30.} Furthermore, as Robert Nye proposes in his study of Le Bon, this all made the crowd ‘open by nature to “suggestions” from the leader hypnotist’\footnote{R. Nye, \textit{The Origins of Crowd Psychology. Gustave Le Bon and the Crisis of Mass Democracy in the Third Republic}, London, Sage, 1975, p.79.} and there can be little doubt that Mussolini qualified as this. According to Le Bon, in the hands of a skilled operator an individual that had been divested of his conscious personality within the crowd could be encouraged to obey the suggestions of the leader, thereby committing acts that were contradictory to his normal personality and beliefs.

Van Ginneken’s study of Le Bon theory identifies a distinctly religious aspect to crowds, whereby they worshipped an apparently superior being. Fearing this being’s power, the crowd blindly submitted to its commands and was unable to discuss the leader’s dogmas without wishing to spread them, while making enemies of those who did not accept them.\footnote{J. Van Ginneken, \textit{Crowds, psychology, and politics 1871-1899}, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p.176.} Such atavistic, barbarous groups with little power of self-reasoning were thus open to the
exploitation of a skilled political elite or individual that could exert authority and take control. As Le Bon argued, the crowd was ‘a servile flock...incapable of ever doing without a master.’ Furthermore, these leaders were often ‘recruited from the ranks of those morbidly nervous, excitable, half deranged persons who are bordering on madness.’\textsuperscript{118} Thus, in addition to being irrational themselves, crowds best responded to leaders that were equally on the threshold of madness and degeneracy.

Despite appearing applicable to Fascism, Le Bon’s thesis, which pre-dated the rise of the extreme interwar European right, was directed against the earlier force of socialism. Having seen the Paris Commune demonstrate the power of the socialist mass, Le Bon believed that ‘a knowledge of the psychology of crowds is to-day the last resource of the statesman who wishes not to govern them - that is becoming a very difficult matter - but at any rate not to be governed too much by them’\textsuperscript{119} Although far more detailed and complex than can and need be enlarged upon here, controlling the socialist masses was the key objective of Le Bon’s thesis.

With this in mind, he confidently asserted that: ‘“to know the art of impressing the imagination of crowds...is to know as well the art of governing them”.’\textsuperscript{120} This is exactly what Mussolini attempted to do. Beyond merely subverting socialism, Le Bon’s theory of crowd psychology was synthesised into something that, one could argue, Mussolini and the Fascist regime employed to maintain and strengthen their respective positions of power and authority. The cult of the leader was nurtured alongside that of the party, both of which were reinforced and legitimised by the development of myths, the use of symbols and the exploitation of leisure-time.

While it may be debatable as to what extent Mussolini was a disciple of Le Bon, there is no doubt that the mass mobilisation of society was a key tenet of Fascism, which made the crowds attending mass cultural spectaculars such as football, hugely important. Yet it would be wrong to portray such cultural events as purely crude propaganda, for Mussolini’s vision, which arguably derived from his interest in crowd theory, was far subtler. As Jeffrey Schnapp has argued in his study of Fascist mass theatre, Mussolini wanted to create an art that would educate on a deeper spiritual level than normal and ‘conjoin an elemental form of

\textsuperscript{118} Le Bon, \emph{The Crowd}, p.118.
“realism” with something more: magic, mystery, myth and a sense of secular, but nonetheless sacred, rituality’.\textsuperscript{121}

Although this interpretation of Fascist art was specifically directed towards theatre, all of the elements contained in the above formula were to be found within the world of calcio. The exalted art that contributed to the processes of education and persuasion was visible in the dramatic, mythical, symbolic stadia that rose throughout Italy and the way calcio was played. There was also the image and identity of teams to consider; what and whom they represented. These aspects all assisted the creation of sacred, secular rituals and myths that ingratiated the regime into the leisure-time of the masses.

In fact, it was the massed ranks of calcio supporters that partly inspired Fascism’s, albeit unsuccessful, promotion of mass theatre. Giovacchino Forzano, an OND official, recounted the experience of his first football match in 1927. Observing the crowd’s passionate enthusiasm for the match when sat alongside Giuseppe Bottai and party secretary Augusto Turati, Forzano exclaimed: ‘“If only they would get so enthused at open-air theater performances!”’.\textsuperscript{122} Turati’s response was to make him responsible for a mobile theatre project that was charged with exposing provincial audiences to Italian high culture. In the process, it would extend the regime’s ““spiritual and intellectual reclamation”’ of Italy and propagate Italian ““in those areas where dialects still hold our marvelous language in the thrall of deformity””.\textsuperscript{123}

In this case, it was football that made the PNF leadership appreciate how mass cultural spectacles could be an effective medium for the development and imposition of national identity throughout the nation. Despite numerous attempts to promote theatre, many of the ideas were arguably more applicable to calcio. One example was the Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico - National Institute of Ancient Drama - that was intended:

“to gather the people together at classical celebrations that point to the [people’s] past and unveil anew the beauty of our simple and serene art; and to summon the new intellectual classes to collaborate in this work of regeneration, making them look backward, so that when they look forward, the vision of the past greatness of our race will infuse with greater amplitude and, therefore, dignity their vision of our artistic and political tomorrow.”\textsuperscript{124}

As will be seen in the following chapters, the fundamentals of this eloquent description of the desired role for theatre that emphasised Fascism’s somewhat dichotomous relationship with the past and future, more or less contained the key aims of the Fascist football project.

\textsuperscript{121} Schnapp, Staging Fascism, p.32.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., p.18.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., p.18.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., p.25.
Despite the lofty ambitions to create a new theatrical art, by 1933 the genre more or less remained a preserve of the middle classes. This prompted Mussolini to demand that members of the Italian Society of Authors and Publishers (SIAE) interpret the era’s collective passions by preparing a ‘theater of masses, a theatre that can contain 15,000 or 20,000 persons.’ The statement was intended to attack theatre’s bourgeois exclusivity that he believed resulted from venues with limited seats at high prices, which excluded the masses as much as they included the affluent.

Although lacking specific detail, Mussolini’s speech, along with the well documented writings of Massimo Bontempelli who Schnapp credits with setting ‘the intellectual tone for the entire era’, stimulated a number of projects and ideas. Among these was the industrial engineer Gaetano Ciocca’s proposal to construct democratic stadium-sized theatres that would give a greater number of people the best possible spectacle at the minimum expense. In the theatre of masses, the ‘nut’ of the problem was mathematical: combining ‘the maximum number of spectators with the best visibility and sound’. Yet, even if it were easier to attract more people who could only afford to pay less, this still did not solve all of the problems as there was the aesthetic dynamic to contend with too, if the passions of the masses were to be sufficiently raised. Consequently, Ciocca suggested that theatre for the masses needed to be monumental in both its size and scale of production, which required an enormous stage to accommodate thousands of actors in a production that would be ‘the synthesis of the work of the collective, the glorification of popular struggles... the expression of the passions of the nation.’

Ciocca’s proposed arenas would have replicated many of the advances already found in the new football stadia. By blending the Fascist present with the tradition of the Roman past, his interpretation of the amphitheatre moved the stage to the centre of the arena. Besides making it the obvious focal point, it enabled the old hierarchical seating plan to be replaced by one that not only reflected the apparent social realities of the new era, but also kept prices low. A grandiose, modernistic plan, Ciocca’s vision was still not the most monumental in this era. In fact, it was dwarfed by stadia for 100,000 spectators and more that were

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126 On previous attempts at creating/theorising utopian theatre see Schnapp, Staging Fascism, pp.8-12;
Berghaus, Fascism and Theatre.
127 Schnapp, Staging Fascism, p.43.
129 Ibid., p.10.
130 Schnapp, Staging Fascism, p.38.
completed in Los Angeles and Berlin for the 1932 and 1936 Olympic Games, in addition to Pier Luigi Nervi’s 120,000 capacity theatre that failed to get beyond the drawing board.\textsuperscript{131} Besides serving a Fascist ideal to remove one of the principal supports of this bourgeois art form, the demand for mass, democratic theatre was yet another link to the Roman past, as De Finetti noted:

\begin{quote}
A modern stadium needs to be made for everybody, not for the various privileged classes of spectators: and already the Romans with their highest amphitheatres...had also reached the objective to offer everybody seats of practically the same level of visibility. No differently, we need to aim to make ours modern and not only for positive ‘social aesthetic’ reasons...but also for obvious reasons of practical economy. The motto has to be this: “we do not spend even a penny, we do not waste a bit of steel or a sack of cement to make those seats that the public do not love.”\textsuperscript{132}
\end{quote}

Mussolini’s dream for mass theatre only reached fruition on 29 April 1934, after which the reviews of ‘18 BL’ were mixed at best. Despite the general consensus of opinion that the project had failed, \textit{La Nazione} argued that the desire to create a new type of theatre, worthy of the age, had still ‘revealed that the ferment of thoughts and constructive energies are testimony to the combative and constructive spirit of the new generation.’\textsuperscript{133} Perhaps the most damning criticism however, was the widespread accusation that it had failed both as a spectacle and as a true representation of the struggles and tragedies of the war and the Fascist rise to power.\textsuperscript{134}

Despite the impressive sound amplification many members of the audience, especially those in the cheaper popular seats, were still alienated from the action by distance, thereby repeating theatre’s age-old problem. They were also apparently alienated by the script and an inherent difficulty in both associating and empathising with a truck as the hero. The architect and cultural nationalist Ugo Ojetti uncompromisingly highlighted the inappropriateness of the protagonist: “‘Art is man. Machines without men are soulless wood and metal.’” His suggestion was supported by the theatre critic Giuseppe Longo who similarly supported the essential human element: “‘There is always a danger when one places an inanimate being at the center of a heroic action…. For temperamental reasons we Latins are not prone to exalting machinery.’”\textsuperscript{135}

For whatever reasons, despite considerable planning, expense and a cast of over 2,000 performers, the theatre of masses for the masses was unable to produce a spectacle that could

\textsuperscript{131} See P.L. Nervi, ‘Idee Sulla Costruzione di Uno Stadio Per 120.000’, \textit{Quadrante}, August 1933, p.36.
\textsuperscript{132} ‘Gli otto stadi del Campionato del mondo’, \textit{Lo Sport Fascista}, p.33.
\textsuperscript{133} ‘L’equivoco dello spettacolo di masse’, \textit{La Nazione}, 12/5/34, p.5.
\textsuperscript{134} Schnapp, \textit{Staging Fascism}, p.79.
\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Ibid.}, p.83, note 2.
electrify and mobilise 20,000 spectators. Conceptually it was undoubtedly an ideal Fascist cultural activity, breaking down some, if not all, of the liberal bourgeois barriers that had maintained theatre's exclusivity. In practice, however, the reality could not match the theory.

The failure of '18BL' was persuasive evidence to support Bontempelli's suggestion that, in fact, football was the medium through which the ideal of Italy's cultural modernity could best be expressed and the masses mobilised. Directly contrasting with this theatrical one-off spectacular, calcio was already electrifying and mobilising well in excess of 20,000 spectators every weekend, for the best part of 40 weeks a year. More to the point, it did so not just at one venue but in stadia throughout the country. Although inspired by calcio, the theatre of masses for masses was unable to even approach the levels of performance, excitement and mobilisation that were found in the modern football arena where collective struggle, joy and tragedy were integral parts of every show. Modern stadiums with steep terracing ensured that spectators were never alienated from the action, either visually or aurally. Their contributions to the spectacle was also increasingly recognised by clubs like Bologna that began to offer subsidised travel, such was their potential influence on results.

With crowds of 20,000 to 50,000-plus not uncommon at some stadia, spectators had more than just a voyeuristic role in an event in which the central protagonists were not only human but often ordinary, if albeit specially gifted members of society capable of inspiring the nation. As Il Bargello demanded: 'We want a generation that has strengthened itself in everything that is competitive, that is struggle; and even when one cannot be a player it is still good to participate directly, because beyond muscles it is necessary to toughen the spirits.' Unlike the soulless machines of '18BL', calcio's main characters, the players themselves, represented a Fascist mass society that was ordered, passionate, organic and nationalistic. While mass theatre did not necessarily require the involvement of huge audiences, sport in general and calcio in particular was a far more obvious opportunity to attract and manipulate huge crowds, as the Duce recognised: 'It is always necessary to further interest the masses in all categories of sport.... It is necessary to produce sport practiced by the growing mass of Italians with its undoubted use from the fascist, moral and physical point of view.'

Outside of war, football was the most obvious metaphorical 'battlefield' where heroic individual acts were carried out for the benefit of the collective. Moreover, while

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136 'Il Duce e lo sport', Il Bargello, 14/12/30, p.2.
‘18BL’ was criticised for its confused joint scriptwriting exercise that included no less than eight Fascist critics, playwrights and directors, responsibility for success and failure in football stopped with the coach. Not only did calcio reflect the Fascist vision of organic society in which the needs of the individual were subsumed beneath those of the mass collective, it also reaffirmed the leadership principle.

Despite calcio’s impressive credentials, to become the mass cultural medium through which mass society was to be reached and mobilised required more stadia fitting the bill. By accommodating more than just football these new stadia, many of which had been constructed throughout the peninsula by 1934, were also specifically designed to host mass political rallies, choreographed displays and general public usage. Such events ensured their regular utilisation and integration into the social fabric of the local community. This was also helped by their contributions to calcio’s regular spectacles, replete with images and symbols that were more often associated with official Fascist events. It was this deliberate display of symbols and imagery that was intended to subtly mobilise the masses during their leisure-time and perhaps there was no better example than the aesthetically contrasting, cutting-edge arenas of the Giovanni Berta stadium in Florence and the Littoriale stadium in Bologna.

Despite the regime’s apparent tolerance of diversity in all cultural forms, including art and architecture, creators could not ignore their patrons, as Marla Stone has argued. In the case of virtually all sports stadia built under the regime, the patron was the local party. Despite the room for artistic-license provided by the national party, local parties were a different matter. Although the two arenas of Florence and Bologna were completely opposite in their design, they strongly reflected the well-defined, proud, individual identities of their respective city leaders and local party hierarchs, while equally conforming to the exacting demands of the game and the regime. By exemplifying the room for individual creativity, they represented the apparent philosophical contradictions of the regime’s cultural influences that enabled it to market a modern, futuristic, revolutionary, if somewhat reactionary society, while extolling the virtues of its Roman past. Outside of the capital, nowhere was the regime more connected to its Imperial past than Bologna, with its Romanesque Littoriale stadium. Just across the Apennines in Florence, the modernistic and revolutionary Giovanni Berta stadium could not have provided a starker comparison. As will be seen in the two following chapters, the contrast between the experiences of both cities said much about the regime’s
view of nation that appears to have manifested itself in a fluid interpretation of local identity that somehow served all needs.

5. Arpinati, Bologna, *Calcio*: the ABC to success

One day, when considering the wonderful sporting rebirth of the nation and of the infinite good that is guiding youth to the healthy disciplines of sport and physical recreation, Arpinati planned to build in Bologna, this effective rail centre of Italy, a technically perfect arena, capable of hosting enthusiasts of all athletic sports and more than fifty thousand spectators. All of the city helped and encouraged the pioneer of such a bold idea and in the shortest of time the project, set on a solid financial base and with no speculative ends, rather with noble intentions, began to be realised.¹

Celebrating the Littoriale stadium’s official opening the Bologna Fascist Federation’s weekly publication, *L’Assalto*, ensured that Leandro Arpinati was credited as the creator of one of Italy’s greatest modern constructions. The idea to build a great stadium in Bologna came to him while visiting the Baths of Caracalla in Rome and was said to have been rooted in his profound conviction ‘that sport might be the best method to give our youth a healthy, moral and national education beyond the physical’.² Besides improving the health of the nation, *L’Assalto* - which was founded by Arpinati with the support of local agrarian financiers who were opposed to Mussolini’s still prudent policies - also identified the local party’s desire to put Bologna firmly on the map. Its stadium of international repute would help Italy attract major sporting events that might serve its quest for domestic and international respectability.

‘The first amphitheatre of the Fascist Revolution’³ was an effective description of the Littoriale by Arpinati’s biographer, who deliberately linked the Imperial past with Fascist modernity.⁴ By combining traditional and modern architecture, building materials and techniques, the Roman amphitheatre was adapted to the needs of the Fascist era. The result was the most modern stadium in Europe that Gallian believed ‘signalled the muscular prestige of the race: the Littoriale is worthy of the Colosseum, for its significance as a building and as the first true monument of the new epoch’.⁵

From 1924 onwards, a close relationship developed between the stadium, the regime and the city of Bologna,⁶ which was the first in Italy to come under Fascist control. Yet almost as soon as the gates opened on the new sports ground for the people they were slammed shut on democracy, following an assassination attempt upon the Duce in Bologna.

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³ Gallian, *Arpinati...*, p.13. For biographical detail of Gallian see Chapter 1, Note 87.
on 31 October 1926. The consequent abolition of all remaining constitutional freedoms signalled the beginning of the real Fascist era, while strengthening the case for those who argued that sport was little more than a diversionary activity.

The construction of the Littoriale illustrated the regime's awareness of the potential to exploit culture, sport and football in particular, not only as a means of improving the health of the young but also to mobilise the masses to a level that had previously proved unattainable. For this reason, the arena’s managers were charged with designing a programme of affordable events to benefit the nation and the physical education of its youth. The stadium’s success story was also embellished by the achievements of its main occupant, Bologna Football Club (BFC). So important was the team to the city that the commune did all within its powers to ensure the club remained at the pinnacle of the Italian game. However, the greater its success the more it was exposed to many foreign influences, through regular forays in the Coppa d’Europa and six Central European coaches from 1921-1942.

Bologna’s experience can be seen as a microcosm of calcio in general under the regime, providing a crude, working example of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony in which the combination of culture and the state maintained the status quo. Therefore, the history of Bolognese sport in this period can be seen as an example of how the ruling elite attempted to make concessions in order to seek new alliances and maintain its dominance, although this is not to suggest that it necessarily succeeded.

Furthermore, the Littoriale served both local and national ambitions that were not always complimentary. Far from exemplifying shared interests, the monument highlighted the inevitable contradictions that arose from the regime’s promotion of local sports initiatives for the good of the national whole. A huge achievement for the nation’s self belief and international reputation, it also intensified provincial sentiments of campanilismo as Bologna and its football club rose to the top echelon of Italian sport.

Arpinati: Mayor of Bologna and ‘man of sport’

Born into a socialist household in Civitella di Romagna on 29 February 1892, Leandro Arpinati was a dishwasher before training as an electrician and working on the state railways. As the leader of a local anarchist group he met Mussolini, the socialist, for the first time in 1910. Although differing in political philosophies, their immediate affinity seems to

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7 'Il Littoriale: ideato, voluto... ', L’Assalto, p.3.
have been built upon a common desire to establish a new form of society. Employed in a
reserved occupation Arpinati avoided the Great War, but its aftermath still profoundly
affected him. Post 1918 Italy was in chaos with over 600,000 soldiers dead and more than
500,000 having returned mutilated. Italy also had the economic burdens of the conflict plus
the psychological damage of failed irredentist ambitions to contend with, all of which
contributed to the creation of a political vacuum that was exploited by the ex-combatants
association, the Fasci di Combattimento, from which the PNF drew much support.

Emerging in the Po Valley, Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna, the Fascist squads used
violence to break up Socialist meetings and impede the work of the new agricultural wage
labourers unions. A founder member of the Bologna fascio, on 10 April 1919, Arpinati
became its leader the following year. Dominated by students, his frustration with the fascio’s
inactivity during the summer months precipitated its radical restructure in October 1920,
after which, according to Adrian Lyttelton, it ‘merged with older patriotic organisations’ to
suddenly become ‘a force of major political importance’. Arpinati established a
personalised rule over the squads, meting out summary justice to those members who
indulged in the vendettas of the winter and spring of 1920-1 that were intended to expand
Fascism through a systematic campaign of terror against socialists and their local
institutions. While reflecting Arpinati’s pragmatic leadership as much as any suggested
sense of justice and fair play, the fascio’s destabilisation of the local political culture only
reinforced his growing authority.

The fascio’s new strength was demonstrated on 21 November 1920, when Arpinati
led an assault on Bologna’s civic centre, the Palazzo d’Accursio, in an attempt to prevent the
communal Socialist administration from taking office. Demonstrating the radical nature of
both the city fascio and its leader, who developed a reputation as a man of action, the exact
events of the incident are vague and vary according to the source. What is known for sure is

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9 Another suggestion is that he avoided the war as the eldest son of a widow. D. Susmel, ‘Il Ras del Pallone’,
*Domenica del Corriere*, 69, 36, 29/8/67, p.16.
10 For detailed accounts of the Fascist rise to power see Lyttelton, *Seizure of Power*, 1987; R. De Felice, *La
Conquista del Potere (1919-1925)*, Torino, Einaudi, 1995; E. Ragionieri, *Dalla dittatura fascista alla
12 Ibid., p.38.
that the Fascists were involved in a battle that concluded with ten dead socialists and one martyred nationalist, Giulio Giordani. Eight years later Lo Sport Fascista recorded its version of events in an article dedicated to Arpinati, when head of the FIGC.

He was committed to the battle...head of a squad of one hundred friends that in a few hours, on his orders, struck down the socialism that held the glorious city like a conquered land, reviving the population and restoring order. From that day it was the start of a methodical struggle against the socialist tyranny that extended from the city to the countryside rooting out the bad antinational plant wherever.\footnote{Lo Sport Fascista, 10, 1929, p.9.}

In January 1921, Arpinati was arrested for illegally possessing firearms. According to one recent biographer, this ‘was the first Arpinati, daring and impetuous, an instrument of the regime and of capitalism, son of that common fascism, far from those power games that came to be built around him’.\footnote{M. Grimaldi, Leandro Arpinati. Un anarchico alla corte di Mussolini, Roma, Società Stampa Sportiva, 1999, p.13.} The remark is indicative of the many failures to impartially appraise his career, another being his daughter Giancarla Cantamessa Arpinati’s dedication to defending his memory from apparently ‘uninformed journalists describing my father as a crude plebeian’.\footnote{G. Cantamessa Arpinati, Arpinati Mio Padre, Il Sagittario, Roma, 1968, pp.23-24.} Despite his high position within the PNF he left few writings, which only increases the difficulty in sifting the myth from the mire.

There can be little doubt, however, that his views were often unconventional and he did not always toe the party line. This was evident in his opposition to corporatism and his spirited attempt to defend institutions of local government when under attack from the Fascist federations. Perhaps indicative of his idealism and political pragmatism, although more likely the image that Lo Sport Fascista wished to portray for the new head of the FIGC, Arpinati was said to have been everybody’s friend, which might have surprised some Bolognese socialists: ‘Arpinati was never hated. In Bologna and in the entire province, he never had and does not have enemies. Liberals, democrats, socialists, masons speak of him with respect, often with fondness, with admiration; with no little affection and gratitude.’\footnote{Grimaldi, Leandro Arpinati, p.13.}

Although apparently committed to a new political and social order, Arpinati was a pragmatist too, happy to advance his career by whatever ways and means necessary. However, with Arpinati and Fascism both long dead, it was his idealism and fairness that Vittorio Pozzo later recalled. As coach of the Italian national team for almost the entire Fascist era, he had an especially close working relationship with Arpinati, who he believed:

‘was a morally straight man. With him you could have frank and sincere meetings, without paying so many compliments…. The man, in himself, I liked, and I was not wrong: he died for his ideas that were, to a certain extent, anti-fascist.’

Again, socialists and Arpinati’s political opponents in general may have thought differently.

Following Mussolini’s rise to power Arpinati became Secretary of the Provincial Fascist Federations in Bologna, head of the entire province, ras of all the ras. Committed to the construction of a new Fascist society, it has been argued that he began to explore alternative means of establishing and maintaining consensus in this period. One non-violent option came through his control of Bologna’s daily newspaper Il Resto del Carlino.

As part of a complicated deal involving the ‘Poligrafici Riuniti’ group, Arpinati became proprietor of the newspaper on 4 March 1927, when Senator Edoardo Agnelli transferred 7,100 shares to him at a cost of two-million Lire. How and if he actually paid for the shares is an issue of great speculation, despite the Agnelli family’s conviction that the donation had been to Bolognese Fascism rather than its leader. Arpinati’s daughter has since argued that the shares were given specifically to her father rather than to the commune or the regime.

The definitive reason behind the transaction remains uncertain following the seizure and apparent destruction of documents pertaining to the deal. One historian of Il Resto del Carlino has suggested that the good of the local and national party was the Agnelli family’s main motivation, although the appearance of serving party interests while tending those of the family may be closer to the truth. Besides intimidation, legislative controls and agreements with newspaper proprietors, the regime also sought to expand the limited circulation of its press by establishing deals with groups of financiers to purchase newspapers on its behalf. In Bologna, as in the rest of Italy, journalists were forced to join the Fascist syndicate if they wished to continue working. Those who had been employed by the anti-fascist press were struck off the professional list, while from 1927-8 the syndicate actively attempted to purge papers of non-Fascists and appoint sympathetic members to editorial

20 Onofri, I Giornali Bolognesi, p.104.
21 Cantamessa Arpinati, Arpinati Mio Padre, p.52.
22 Bilocchi, Il Resto del Carlino, p.134.
23 Onofri, I Giornali Bolognesi, p.53.
positions. Somewhere within these potential explanations probably rests the truth, but it is the confusion surrounding these shares that Arpinati’s daughter believes resulted in his implication in the financial scandal that ultimately ended his career in 1934.

Despite its declining readership, Arpinati’s complete acquisition of *Il Resto del Carlino* unquestionably assisted his control of the city, although it was not his only supporter among the Bolognese press. Besides *Vita Nuova*, the weekly publication of the provincial Fascist Party that was a forum for the expression of new political and cultural ideas, Arpinati’s two other creations, *L’Assalto* and *Il Littoriale*, both strongly supported his work. The latter, a daily dedicated to national and specifically local sporting life, which became the official mouthpiece of CONI, apparently wooed over one-million of *Il Carlino*’s readers. Through these organs, with the support of some national papers and journals, the publicity surrounding the entire stadium project raised Arpinati’s profile and embossed his reputation as ‘the man of sport’.

Apparently in recognition of his efforts within the city, Arpinati was appointed Podestà (Fascist Mayor) on 31 December 1926, following the abolition of the old Sindaco system. In his final communication to the press the departing Sindaco (Mayor) and Fascist, Umberto Puppini, outlined the reasons for the choice of his successor: ‘Such reasons - it might be in the brave work of Leandro Arpinati as head of the revolutionary Bologna squad… the successive tests of organisation and construction… his actual rise to first Magistrate of the city - have been carved in the mind and intimately felt in the heart of all.’

In the traditions of a movement that glorified death as much as life, Puppini gave Arpinati’s appointment the posthumous approval of Giulio Giordani, the nationalist martyred in 1921: ‘The spirit of Giulio Giordani… has returned to the chamber that was a shrine for the tragic sacrifice. He is here among us, gentlemen; we are sure that he is pleased.’ He concluded by entrusting Arpinati with the responsibility of safeguarding the city’s reputation and best interests.

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26 Arpinati apparently gained the entire package of shares on 16 June 1933, although there is a suggestion they may have been owned by his loyal friend Germano Mastellari. See Onofri, *I Giornali Bolognesi*, p.116.
29 ACsb, Ex-Casa del Fascio, I, 2, 1, ‘Comunicato ai Giornali’, 26/12/26, p.2.
His faith was not misplaced as Arpinati ensured the continuing development of the city’s prestige and importance in a variety of ways, none more so than through Bologna FC and the Littoriale stadium. Having been made vice-secretary of the national party in this period, Arpinati’s workload expanded beyond just city affairs. Yet, such was his apparent influence over the locality and its institutions that his biographer proclaimed his dominance in all areas of the province, although this may well have been a deliberate attempt to create the illusion of great authority. ‘Perhaps it is already felt in many areas of Italian political life, certainly in all the sporting areas reawakened, organised and revalued by him for Fascist Italy…. Italian sport needs Arpinati.’

Despite his apparently unique role in reawakening Italian athleticism, Arpinati became known as more than just ‘the man of sport’. If Mussolini was credited with the inspiration and vision to improve the nation’s fitness, Arpinati was quickly established as the interpreter and practitioner of the Duce’s wishes. According to Gallian, once Mussolini had brought into light ‘the qualities of our race, the attributes of our land: Arpinati, alone, signalled what will need to be the great battle of the championships and the Olympics’.

To achieve this goal he was given a national responsibility in what was perhaps his most demanding and arguably most successful role. Having been vice-president of the *Federazione Italiana di Atletica Leggera* (FIDAL) - the Italian Athletics Association - since 1925, Arpinati was asked by Lando Ferretti to assume the presidency of the FIGC and oversee the implementation of the Carta di Viareggio. A notable moment in his career, it was also extremely significant for Bologna as it entailed the transfer of the FIGC headquarters from its historic base in Turin.

Arpinati added the presidency of CONI to his portfolio in 1931, which he held until 1933 when his dismissal from the Interior Ministry signalled his political decline that culminated with internal exile. In fact, *calcio* was allegedly at the root of the rivalry/feud with Achille Starace that ultimately led to his removal from office. Having refused the party secretary and his guests entry to an international match, Arpinati directed them to the ticket office along with everybody else. While it generated animosity between the two, the incident also contrasted Arpinati, the apparent Fascist ideologue, with Starace whose career could be said to have been more pragmatic. The incident also shows how ticketing for such mass popular events was an opportunity for the regime to portray itself as the enforcer of law

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33 *Ibid.*, p.34.
and order, as it did during the 1934 World Cup. Arpinati also acquired a number of friends during his time as FIGC president, his dismissal provoking letters of support from the Hungarian and Japanese federations. Edoardo Agnelli, President of Juventus FC, was one of the many within the country who, according to Arpinati’s daughter, expressed real gratitude for his work within the sporting sphere.

Despite his former secretary, Mario Lolli, arguing to the contrary, calcio was unquestionably reordered under Fascist terms during Arpinati’s tenure at the FIGC. Given that subservience to the needs of the regime was a principal reason for the fascistisation of the Federation and calcio as a whole, Lolli’s protestation rang somewhat hollow. In fact, even the early years of Arpinati’s presidency saw a considerable centralisation of calcio. Dismissed from the FIGC on the eve of success, he failed to oversee Italy’s most significant international victories. However, he was undoubtedly responsible for the implementation of a long-term development plan that ensured calcio’s future rude good health.

In 1928, long before the successes could have been predicted, Gallian made a startlingly prescient, if baseless, assessment of the quality of the seeds sown by ‘the man of sport’ and the crop they would yield. Yet the reality of what the future held was less important than the contemporary image he was constructing:

Arpinati introduced that sense of athletic responsibility that had previously not existed in Italy; he is the man of preparation, because he understood that in Italy, in that field, it was all to do, everything to prepare; only in some years time will the fruits be seen and they will be the most beautiful ever known.

By 1934 the accuracy of Gallian’s prediction and the fruits of Arpinati’s labour were evident for all to see, including the new FIGC President, General Vaccaro, as the azzurri embarked on an unprecedented period of world domination. Not only had Arpinati’s Littoriale provided the best facilities for Italian athletes it had, according to Gallian, also inspired a tenacity and desire to succeed among all athletes:

...that is what counts the most....to hear from their mouths the intentions and desires for tomorrow; to run into the stadium with the fascio littorio on their chest: and fight. I have often been stunned or amazed, when I have had the opportunity to admire them all, nourished by Leandro Arpinati: in Rome and outside, their minds often turn to the Littoriale as the first sign of the new falange of Italian sport.

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34 Grimaldi, Leandro Arpinati, p.82.
37 Ibid., pp.97-98.
38 Gallian, Arpinati, p.42.
39 Ibid., p.48.
Arpinati was unquestionably the driving force behind the conception and the construction of the Littoriale, which the contemporary architect De Finetti hailed as 'the first great post-war sports facility to be built by public enterprise'. It was a suitably vague assessment of the stadium’s financial backing that, as will be demonstrated, stretched far beyond the public purse and will. Undeterred by murky accounting processes, Gallian declared the project a shining example of the shared intent of the regime and Arpinati to put the nation firmly on the route to recovery. However, his appraisal of the Littoriale’s merits revealed how the regime could only define itself and forge a sense of identity through comparison with the outsider, rather than any positive sense of self:

...the amphitheatre of Arpinati, the Bologna stadium, is really the opposite, the reaction, the vendetta, against modern Paris, the authority of old literature and of old decadent types: it is the reaction against a lifestyle that loved hypocrisy and covert force, against simplicity, the clarity of cold steel: it is the life of the sun against the life of the night...it is health against illness.

In whatever manner, the Littoriale symbolised the emergence of a new Fascist identity in Bologna. Perhaps aware of Arpinati’s meteoric rise within the party, his clients, supporters and colleagues were all keen to publicly recognise his contribution to the regeneration of the city as a whole. As Lando Ferretti noted in L’Assalto in 1926:

He celebrated the anniversary of the March on Rome, in 1923, with the opening of the Casa del Fascio; the second with the inauguration of the Fascist University; the third with the start of the works for the “Littoriale” that need to be completed, in twelve tireless months, by the 29th October this year.

In Fascist eyes, Arpinati, the Littoriale and Bologna were rising together.

A national stadium for a provincial city

Despite his violent early career, once the Fascist takeover was more or less accomplished Arpinati envisaged a different, less aggressive, role for the local party. He wanted it to become a ‘hub, the central motor of every political, cultural or sporting activity in Bologna’. Rather than any radical change in his ruthless political outlook, this apparent conversion to non-violent politics seems to reflect how the party took itself directly to the people, once the regime was secure. The construction of the Littoriale was part of this process. It was presented as the initiative and property of the fascio and not that of the commune, although technically it was owned by the Società Pro Casa del Fascio. Although directly controlled by Arpinati, this was an autonomous body created within the Casa del

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40 De Finetti, Stadi. Esempi, p.63.
41 Gallian, Arpinati, pp.24-25.
42 “Il Littoriale”, L’Assalto, 31/7/26, p.3.
43 Onofri & Ottani, Dal Littoriale allo Stadio, p.13.
Fascio for the purpose of receiving the public contributions necessary to build the Littoriale. Theoretically neither the fascio nor the commune could interfere in its business, but the reality was quite different as both parties meddled at almost every given opportunity.

What is beyond dispute is Arpinati’s role in championing the idea of the new sports complex, which he justified in a detailed representation to the city Mayor in March 1925. Stressing the importance of the stadium for fans across the region and Italy, he argued it would improve the nation’s health not only by encouraging a love of sport, but also by distracting the Italian youth from bars and other vices. To achieve this:

- the building would need to comprise of a field for team games and another for all the Olympic events, including a running track, a big swimming pool for exercises and competitions, a covered gymnasium and a series of service rooms for the athletes or the public that pour in on competition days.

His case was strengthened by the fascio having already obtained 60,000 square metres of land in the Melloncello district, one-and-a-half kilometres to the south west of the city walls. Arpinati asked the commune to contribute three per cent of the costs on the interest of the capital, estimated in the region four million Lire, for a period of 15 years, during which time the Pro Casa del Fascio would seek to reduce the debt. The building was a perfect venue for the new Higher Teaching Institute for Physical Education. As part of Bologna University it would be unique in the country, but his trump card was the prestige that such a stadium would bestow upon the city: ‘Allow me to point out...that the intervention of the commune would speed up the works, enabling them to finish in the current year and bypass the other cities in Italy that already have projects of this type and might finish before Bologna.’

On 20 July 1925, the commune’s Executive Committee recommended awarding L.150,000 per annum to the body acting as proprietor of the stadium. This was conditional on the building being made available free of charge to the Higher Institute of Physical Education and Bologna University students during the 15 years in which the commune was repaying the loan, after which the municipality would become the proprietor.

In general, the councillors supported the plan on the basis of the considerable local and national prestige that was to be gained from such a stadium in the city. One of the most

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47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
vocal was the soon be mayor, councillor Manaresi, who applauded the proposal for responding ‘to the modern concept of physical education of the masses’ that had become so important in the most advanced nations of the world. Citing the Czechoslovak Minister for Sport’s position as second in the government hierarchy, he suggested this showed how many European politicians and thinkers had begun to envisage a new role for sport, which linked nationalism with racial fitness:

Sport is also education of the spirit and we, who intend to rejuvenate our race need to encourage all of the initiatives that serve to diffuse the love of sport even further among our people. The success of our athletes in foreign lands...constitutes the best Italian propaganda abroad. Justifiably, Mussolini has said that beyond representing a heartening physical progress of the race, our champions are our best foreign ambassadors.

The national government understood the highest function of sport and, consequently, has encouraged every initiative in this field. Therefore, I do not hesitate to believe that the initiative so courageously undertaken by Arpinati and so efficiently encouraged by the communal administration is the most appropriate, especially as it will help establish the Higher Institute of Physical Education in Bologna.... (Applause)  

Councillor Ballarini added to Manaresi’s sentiments by stressing how the proposal would help to preserve the leading position in Italian and European education that Bologna had held for centuries. Given the applause from his colleagues, who were collectively responsible for considering the merits of the project, the local benefits were clearly of principal importance in their decision. As Manaresi summed up: the administration was ‘always improving a works programme that again reaffirms the primacy of our city...that time will not be able to cancel and nobody will ever be able to ignore. (Applause)’

All 31 members unanimously approved the plan that allocated an annual contribution of L.150,000, for 15 years, to the Campo Polisportivo’s (Multisport Ground) proprietorial body. The commune’s financial commitment to the construction of the new stadium was intended to do more for Bologna than merely provide a stylish, eye-catching display window for the city’s football team. It was the concessions towards the existing institutions for physical education and the provision of free sporting opportunity for the next generation that ultimately secured the local authority’s backing.

In 1927, to best exploit the Littoriale’s multisport potential and to satisfy Arpinati’s desire to form a nationally important sports society in the city, Bologna FC became a federated member of the newly constituted multisport association ‘Bologna Sportiva’.

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50 Ibid., p.3.
51 Ibid., pp.3-4.
52 Ibid., p.4.
Besides pooling resources, it was hoped the new structure would equip member clubs and societies to achieve even more national success and recognition by helping them to identify and develop the talents of the city’s youth. As the fascio’s publication *L’Assalto* explained:

“Bologna Sportiva”, different from many other sister companies, has not looked to buy up champion celebrities. but rather, by the will of Leandro Arpinati, has dedicated almost all of its activities to raising the mass of youths that serve in its ranks and from which great champions will inevitably emerge.53

By 1932, with almost 1,500 members in the various sports clubs, of which 279 were footballers,54 ‘Bologna Sportiva’ had contributed to making Emilia-Romagna one of the strongest sporting regions in Italy. As the journalist A.M. Perbellini argued in *Calcio Illustrato*, Arpinati did more than create just the Littoriale in Bologna:

He aroused the collective ardour for physical discipline, he created a Bolognese sporting conscience. And not that conscience that forces people to watch matches, to know the champions and the tables, to fight over an offside or a penalty decision, but that higher atmosphere that forces the individual and the collective to follow and admire the sporting spectacle as an incitement to action.55

To honour Bologna’s sporting progress another local sports newspaper was launched. *La Sberla Sportiva*’s aim was to further support and encourage the city’s athletes without becoming ‘a flag of outdated regionalism, but...being the sporting mouthpiece of our region that has a capital importance in the framing of Italian sport’.56 As local pride and the city’s identity intensified with every sporting victory, local opinion formers demanded that Bologna’s sporting progress be placed within the context of the nation in order to dampen any excessive campanilismo.

In addition to symbolising Fascism’s commitment to the city’s regeneration through grass roots sport, the Littoriale was also an integral part of a general construction project to expand the city towards its suburbs. This included an innovative trade fare district, horticulture centre, hospital, schools, houses, an airport at Borgo Panigale and the new Hippodrome for trotting, all of which Arpinati hoped would make Bologna the most important city in the north and centre of Italy.57 Besides developing Bologna’s national profile, this construction programme was also a way for the local party to stamp its identity on the city, while erasing that of the former leftist administrations for which it was renowned.

54 Ibid., p.7.
55 ‘Arpinati’, *Calcio Illustrato*, I, 1, 2/12/31, p.3.
57 Interview with Professor G. Gresleri, University of Bologna, 20/8/2001.
Arpinati’s quest to make Bologna one of the most important cities in Italy was helped by its strategic position at the hub of the Italian national rail network. Following the construction of the new direct train line to Florence that cut through the Apennine Mountains via a series of tunnels, Bologna became the principal interchange for almost all passengers travelling north or south. From Turin and Milan, whether going towards Bari or Rome, passengers had to either pass through or change at Bologna. It was a key factor in the proposal for the Littoriale that Arpinati gave to the mayor: the ‘geographical and rail position of our city...made me think about the possibility of creating in Bologna...an important national centre for sporting displays of every type'. Indeed, as the programme notes for the 1927 European Swimming, Diving and Water Polo championships confirmed, this infrastructure was helping the Littoriale attract future business and events:

The fortunate geographical position of Bologna today gives it a great strategic and commercial importance. It controls the two principal routes that cross the Apennines and lead to Florence.... One can judge the importance of Bologna as a commercial centre since it is the principal transit point between southern and central Italy.

Bologna was rediscovering or reinventing itself under Fascism; the Littoriale helping to shift and develop its economy by encouraging better use of its geographical and institutional advantages. While augmenting Bologna’s sporting life the Littoriale was also expected to contribute to the city’s economic growth, hence its deliberate multi-purpose design that went beyond the needs of sport. In the space beneath the stadium’s seats and terracing were a number of rooms and salons to accommodate a variety of shows and conventions to promote and develop the city’s industrial, commercial and agricultural sectors, as described in the commune’s monthly publication:

Alluding to the advantage and the prestige that Bologna will derive from this, we were thinking implicitly of the initiatives that will take place, which, up until now, could not even be discussed due to the lack of a venue adapted to them.

It is clear that one talks of shows and expositions of every type.... All of Italian labour, from agriculture to industry, must find the most practical and well-mannered hospitality in the Campo Polisportivo.

Besides the many shows, expositions and fairs that it was hoped would be attracted to the city, the booming spectator sport of calcio proved very lucrative for smaller commercial enterprises. Those sceptics, who questioned both the wisdom of the money spent on the

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Littoriale and the economic merits of calcio, were silenced by the dramatic impact of the inaugural international between Italy and Spain, in 1927.

The combination of the rail network, Bologna’s geographical position and the growing phenomenon of sports tourism, resulted in a huge influx of fans for the game. As Il Resto del Carlino was keen to announce, they made an extraordinary impact upon city businesses: ‘When sport becomes a necessity for people to enjoy themselves at spectaculairs and large contests capable of including tens of thousands of people, it benefits commerce and industry perfectly and directly.⁶¹ Although it was Arpinati’s own paper that was endorsing the commercial wisdom of ‘his’ construction of the Littoriale, the alleged impact of a crowd of 60,000 or more, upon such a small city, was persuasive.

It is impossible to assess exactly how many fans came from outside of Bologna, but on the day of the match the city’s hotels were said to have been completely full and turning away customers in their droves. Restaurants that had ordered three-times the normal amount of provisions, in anticipation of the rise in trade, still ran out of food. Some bars, especially in the centre, were forced to close having exhausted their supplies of coffee, sugar and beer. Public services, such as taxis and carriages, also came under assault from the huge volume of spectators trying to reach the stadium from the city centre, one driver apparently making the journey over 16-times in the space of two hours. The rest of the crowd, more than half in all probability, arrived by foot and public transport that was stretched to the limit.⁶² This mass of people caused further chaos in the stadium, thereby questioning one journalist’s recollection of the day’s organisational perfection, as the regime had demanded: ‘this formidable march of people was able to flow to the stadium without even the minimum of incident, it occupied without congestion the allocated seats.... The merit of a simply perfect organisation, completely worthy of the event.’⁶³ Chaotic or not, Bologna’s traders and small businessmen appreciated the inherent value of the Littoriale to the city’s economy.

While it was hoped that successfully staging large events and international tournaments would help both the city’s and the regime’s quest to host even higher profile events, the Littoriale’s facilities were, nonetheless, primarily intended to develop sporting opportunity and improve the health and fitness of the Bolognesi. However, following its trumpeted opening and early promise, the Littoriale complex was rarely a hive of activity.

⁶¹ ‘Il Campo polisportivo…’, Il Comune di Bologna, p.443.
⁶³ Ibid., p.4.
Despite the improved transport links, its position in the city suburbs was considered too far for many to travel. So deserted was the 1927 Bologna trade fare that it was moved back to the town centre the following year. It remained there until 1935 when the Littoriale was used again, this time with the accompaniment of a number of sporting activities to entice the public. With the athletics, tennis and swimming facilities equally underused a competition was launched, in 1934, to design a poster to attract more bathers. The L.500 prize money went to the sculptor Bruno Boari for his submission ‘Maggio 1934’ (May 1934), after which the commune distributed 1,000 bill posters, 3,000 posters and 10,000 postcards throughout the city.64

The apparent antipathy of the Bolognesi seemed to extend to the stadium itself. After the enthusiasm of the first international, when it was rammed beyond capacity, the Littoriale was rarely sold-out for football matches, even during Bologna FC’s golden era from 1925 onwards. Although transport issues were cited as a disincentive, it should be remembered that Bologna was only a city of around 200,000 inhabitants; thereby requiring one-quarter of the population to fill it. It is this statistic that brings us closer to the true, political purpose of the Littoriale’s construction. Unless the architect failed to consider the size of the potential market, which was limited to the city population due to age old animosities between the Bolognesi and the countryside’s Romagnoli, it was clearly too big, irrespective of the team’s achievements. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that the monumental scale of the Littoriale was, first and foremost, intended to serve a visible propaganda role rather than respond to the needs and desires of Bologna’s citizens; reflecting Arpinati’s true vision of the stadium as a national rather than local arena.

Bolognese excellence, fascistically funded

While there was significant government and public funding for the Littoriale, the role of the local savings bank (Casa di Risparmio di Bologna), which has rarely, if ever, been mentioned, cannot be ignored. Besides revealing the unscrupulous capabilities of the local party when trying to fund a project it could ill afford, its bank loan poses serious questions as to what extent it was justifiable for De Finetti to refer to the stadium as the first to be built solely from public enterprise.65

64 ACSB, CA X, 3, 5, PG 1116.
65 De Finetti, Studi: Esempi, p.63.
The commune’s commitment to financing a large percentage of the stadium’s costs included a clause in which it renounced all responsibility for any debts the bank might contest against the Società Pro Casa del Fascio, should it default on its repayments. Annually, the commune sent the agreed sum directly to the Pro Casa del Fascio, which used it to repay the initial loan to the bank.

Despite the commune’s commitment, the payments did not commence until 1927, which left the immediate construction costs to be met by a central government payment of L.1,000,000. This contribution also ensured the local administration did not renege on its financial commitments to the project. Podestà Arpinati promised, on behalf of the commune, to follow the national government’s example by ‘contributing adequately to the construction costs of the “Littoriale”’. It is perhaps this that convinced De Finetti the stadium had been publicly funded.

In 1931, with the Littoriale long completed and the annual loan repayments being made without hitch, the commune guaranteed another loan for the Società Pro Casa del Fascio from the National Insurance Institute (Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni). The sum of L.14,000,000 was intended to rationalise the Society’s debts that derived from the construction costs of the Casa del Fascio and the Littoriale. If the Society defaulted on repaying its loan, the Littoriale and its assets would become the de jure property of the commune. Even more importantly, the contracts were all said to have been ‘extraneous from the Savings Bank’.

Despite this loan, the Pro Casa del Fascio began to experience serious financial problems in 1933, which resulted in its liquidation by December that year. The ownership of the Littoriale then passed directly to the commune that exploited the legal loophole to deny any responsibility for repaying the original loan. Two weeks later the bank made its first formal demand to Mayor Manaresi for the outstanding payment that was now six-months overdue, thereby beginning a complicated legal wrangle that was to last some time. Manaresi’s legal office maintained that the commune’s only obligation was to ensure the free

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67 Ibid., p.1.
69 Ibid., p.2.
use of the Littoriale for schoolchildren during the term of the repayments. Thus, once the
stadium became the property of the commune following the liquidation of the Society, the
terms of the agreement were invalidated along with the obligations of both bodies. This
enabled the commune to discharge any commitments towards the local savings bank.

The issue remained unresolved in 1938 and following a final desperate plea from the
bank there are no further records, which makes it impossible to determine how, or even if,
the impasse was resolved. However, given the bank’s continuing demand for the repayments
some four years after they had ceased, and the commune’s complex legal arguments, it
seems reasonable to assume that the local authority had no intention of discussing the issue.
With the onset of war in 1939 one could surmise that the issue fell below more pressing
matters and may well have been swept under the carpet. With ten annual repayments
apparently outstanding, the Casa di Risparmio di Bologna can be seen to have contributed
the significant sum of L.1,500,000 to the Littoriale’s costs. Yet, even added to the central
government’s contribution, this does not account for the stadium’s entire budget. Once again
the commune pushed its begging bowl into the faces of local citizens and the city’s banking
institutions.

Only weeks before the Littoriale’s opening ceremony in the presence of Mussolini,
Arpinati launched a ‘buy a brick’ appeal, asking Il Carlino’s readers to contribute as much or
as little as they could afford. Raising a total of L.857,175, it was another example of the
local party taking itself directly to the people in an effort to create a sense of organic unity
around the new stadium, even if ‘contributions’ were not always necessarily voluntary. Small
businesses were expected to give at least L.1,000 and those that refused apparently had big
problems. Contributions from some of the ‘red’ cooperatives that were still in existence
further indicated the scheme’s compulsory nature. Prospective contributors were reminded
that not only had the Littoriale created a breeding and training ground for the future
generations, there were also many immediate benefits for the city, the most important being
its new status as the centre of Italian sporting life.

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72 For the conditions under which the Littoriale was transferred see ACSBO, Ex-Casa del Fascio, PG.7799.
73 ACSB, Ex-Casa del Fascio II, Foglio aggiunto al PG.25524, 6/8/34 XII.
74 Ibid.
75 ACSB, Ex-Casa del Fascio II, PG.7080, 21/2/38 XVI.
76 See, ACSB, Ex-Casa del Fascio II, PG. 17767, letter from Cassa di Risparmio in Bologna to the Commune
77 Varrasi, Economia,Politica e Sport in Italia, p.251.
78 Onofri & Ottani, Dal Littoriale allo Stadio, p.18.
‘Subscribers’ received a receipt displaying a brick and a L.1,000 note, while some of the lucky ones had their names and donations published in Il Resto del Carlino’s daily, if incomplete, list. Intended to ‘inspire’ the entire city to dig deep, there could only have been one person at the top of the list on day one: ‘the name of the first subscriber, Benito Mussolini, [was] a warning and an encouragement.’ It was hoped that portraying the fundraising exercise as an organic ‘community action’ that represented loyalty and consensus to the regime and the city, would further encourage the public to contribute.

The appeal launched to the city by Bolognese fascism through the voice of Leandro Arpinati, for the purpose of presenting to the Duce...a complete and magnificent show of the constructive strengths of our civic pride, is collecting the largest consensus it has ever been able to.... The second list that we reproduce is another testament of that loyalty to fascism, of that accordance to the fruitful works of fascism that the greater part of our citizens declare today like yesterday, as always, knowing that only by the chosen road will Italy soon reach the widest horizons promised by destiny.

Besides its national significance, the Littoriale’s local importance was a crucial factor in the appeal. Day three emphasised its role in maintaining the city’s historical position as a centre of Italian learning, thinking, culture, arts and civil progress that Il Resto del Carlino suggested had been reduced to the level of all other Italian cities by the State, in united Italy. Besides being a clever attack on the liberal past, giving to the fund was portrayed as a contribution to the intellectual and spiritual rebirth of the city. However, the Littoriale was also significant as, for the first time, it gave equal weight to the importance of sport and more traditional forms of culture in Bologna’s regeneration. By situating sport at the vanguard of the city’s restoration, it was hoped the masses of Bolognese society would feel an immediate sense of inclusion and association with the project. As Il Carlino confirmed to its readers:

Bologna foresees the future and it has given itself to “sport” with a renewed clamour, with an intelligent and exclusive passion. Sport will be the key for the future society, because no moral progress, no intellectual fortune can await a people that might abandon itself to the weakness of vices or idleness. Sport is the only thing that can preserve a people from moral tiredness, from social neurosis, from apathy: the only thing that can warn against luxury and its desertions.

If the Littoriale symbolised Bologna’s renaissance, it was also portrayed as a sign of the sporting regeneration of Fascist society as a whole, from the smallest playing fields to the largest stadia, from amateur participants to professional competitors. As the novelist and Il Resto del Carlino journalist Guglielmo Bonuzzi stated in a publicity pamphlet, the stadium

79 ‘DATE AL LITTORIALE’, Il Resto del Carlino, 14/10/26, p.4.
80 ‘DATE AL LITTORIALE’, Il Resto del Carlino, 15/10/26, p.4.
81 ‘DATE AL LITTORIALE’, Il Resto del Carlino, 16/10/26, p.4.
82 Ibid, p.4.

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was the largest, most daring and convincing demonstration of the regime’s utmost commitment to the use of sport for the physical, mental and moral development of the nation:

It has been justly and repeatedly observed that sport needs to be valued as a school of discipline, as a gymnasium of courage and strength: two convergent elements, productive for individual and collective fruits, because forming and preparing the spirit and the muscles of the young, contributes to giving the motherland a generation of robust and courageous citizens. The Littoriale of Bologna that perfectly fits into the dynamic of contemporary social life - responds to this precise goal.\(^\text{83}\)

For these local and national reasons *Il Carlino* readers were implored to contribute as much as possible on a daily basis, for almost one month.\(^\text{84}\) Even two years after the opening ceremony, the regime continued to employ the Littoriale as a symbol of the consensus it was attempting to establish. In 1929, Arpinati’s local sports daily *Il Littoriale* announced an agreement with a number of other banks in the city to contribute one million Lire towards ‘the physical, moral, hygienic and thus economic improvement of the population’.\(^\text{85}\)

Given the financial demands of such an ambitious work and the complex, sometimes deceitful means by which the funds were obtained, it is hardly surprising that the final cost of the building was never definitely ascertained. One source has put it in the region of L.16,600,000.\(^\text{86}\) Arpinati claimed it had cost L.12,000,000.\(^\text{87}\) but the accounts to prove this were never provided despite frequent requests.\(^\text{88}\) It was a similar story with the construction of the Casa del Fascio for which he was also responsible, both of which partly account for the question marks that punctuated his name particularly after his fall from grace.\(^\text{89}\) Nonetheless, whether by hook or by crook, without Arpinati’s enthusiasm and fundraising scams the Littoriale would most certainly never have been built, for which Bologna, the regime and the Duce had good reason to be grateful.

*Myths, legends and lo stadio*

King Vittorio Emanuele III laid the Littoriale’s first brick on 12 June 1925, with the work intended to be completed in time for the fourth anniversary of the Fascist takeover in October the following year. The tight timescale was not helped by the especially harsh winter and wet spring of 1925-6. Nonetheless, according to *L’Assalto*, it resulted in a fine example


\(^{84}\) ‘DATE AL LITTORIALE’, *Il Resto del Carlino*, 16/10/26, p.4.


\(^{88}\) For more details see Onofri & Ottani, *Dal Littoriale allo Stadio*, pp.17-18.

\(^{89}\) See Varrasi, *Economia, Politica e Sport in Italia*, p.252.

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of organic Fascist society as workers laboured 'with order, discipline..[and]..admirable
industry'. By 31 October 1926, the stadium was ready for the opening ceremony, although
it was two years before it was completed. It was still a highly impressive achievement and a
credit to the efforts and energies of those 300-1,000 workers employed, a figure that also
illustrates the impact of the nationwide stadium-building project upon national
unemployment.

Officially, the design and build process was a collaboration between Arpinati and
the engineer Umberto Costanzini, head of the technical office of the Casa del Fascio. Yet,
despite their very public collaboration, the more experienced Giulio Ulisse Arata was the
architect who, in an act of friendship, agreed not to appear on the official documentation.
As the first major sports project commissioned by the regime it was a huge career
opportunity for Costanzini, the Littoriale becoming the yardstick against which future stadia
were measured.

Supplementing the stadium arena were two swimming pools of international standard,
one indoor of 33 metres and the other outdoor of 50 metres - the first of its type in Italy - four
tennis courts and a gymnasium, in addition to the Institute for Physical Education. [see
Appendix I, Fig 6] The stadium was capable of holding more than 50,000 spectators and
included a football pitch that conformed to CIS regulations. Suitable for international
matches, the commune’s own publication established that: this 'characteristic is of special
interest for a city like ours that occupies first place in the national football competition'.
Already possessing a football club famous Europe, it was hoped that the Littoriale would
further develop the city’s reputation by hosting international matches.

Providing facilities for track and field athletics demanded the stadium’s design was
based on the old Greek ‘U’ shaped model, which was enlarged and grafted onto a semi-
amphitheatre to produce a classic hybrid that blended modernity and antiquity. Further
connections with the past also became evident once the work began in 1925, when
excavations for the swimming pools unearthed nine Etruscan tombs that had unfortunately
been destroyed by the works, plus six stele from the end of the fifth to the sixth centuries BC.

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90 ‘Untitled’, L’Assalto, 22/8/25, p.3.
91 ‘La struttura del campo’, L’Assalto, 28/5/27, p.3.
92 G. Gresleri & P.G. Massaretti, (eds) Norma e arbitrio. Architetti e ingegneri a Bologna 1850-1950, Marsilio,

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The discovery was connected to the late-nineteenth century excavation of hundreds of the same tombs in the Certosa area and reaffirmed the site's historical importance.⁹⁴

In combination with the stadium’s Roman style these links further reasserted the regime’s Imperial heritage, which Mussolini drew attention to in 1929 when discussing the crucial role of stadia and sports facilities in the regeneration of the culture of sport. Singling out the Littoriale as the best demonstration of a Fascist stadium and one that was worthy of ancient Rome, he declared it: ‘a shining example of what can be done with the will and tenacity of Fascism, as personified in Bologna by Leandro Arpinati.’⁹⁵ The myth of Rome was intended to legitimise the regime’s rule by rooting its identity in that of the past while connecting this with promises for the future and a new civilisation. The obsession with Rome and Empire apparently held wide appeal throughout society, especially among the young.⁹⁶ As Tracy Koon notes: ‘Mussolini’s infatuation with things Roman was the central and pivotal point in his view of politics as spectacle.’⁹⁷

Despite repeatedly making these connections between the Littoriale and antiquity, there was also a desire to distinguish it from the old Roman amphitheatres that many considered to have been responsible for the decline of the Empire. As Arpinati stated in _Lo Sport Fascista_: ‘the Littoriale is not a circus act only for spectacles, but it is a centre of vitality, a school, a gymnasium...[where]..every necessary method is offered to the young who want and need to grow in the virile school of Fascism.’⁹⁸ Indeed, while the two swimming pools were necessary to enable competitive swimmers to train all year and compete on an equal footing with their international rivals, local residents were equally encouraged to use the facilities for health and hygiene purposes.

Combining the demands of the present with the practicalities past, the stadium’s aesthetic and its geographical positioning in the suburbs of Bologna were also intended to forge a strong connection with the city. [see Appendix I, Fig 7] Besides its Roman architectural origins, the Littoriale’s façade had a strong medieval influence that was very much in keeping with the city. Although its terracing was completely constructed using the modern fabric of reinforced concrete, unlike the stadiums of Florence and Turin where this was left

⁹⁷ Koon, _Believe, obey, fight_, p.20.
deliberately exposed, the Littoriale’s was shrouded behind a façade of brickwork. As Silvio San Pietro described it:

…the powerful, unbroken facade is articulated by a series of dual openings with superimposed arches which are divided by a regular rhythm of cornices, pilaster strips, window openings, entrances and slight projections - the entire wall surface being in bare brick, the traditional building material of Emilia Romagna.  

Besides creating an aesthetic harmony with the rest of the city, using over 8,000,000 locally-produced bricks also had considerable economic benefits. Minimising the cost of obtaining materials, unlike the marble obelisk erected at the entrance of the Foro Mussolini in Rome that required sailing down the coast from Carrara, the bricks provided a huge boost to this part of the city’s economy. Consequently, the red brick façade that had virtually no structural importance must be seen as a political and aesthetic construction designed to integrate the stadium within the city’s psyche, while harmonising it with the existing urban landscape.

Most importantly and most visibly, this harmonisation was related to the Littoriale’s position beside the four-kilometre, 660 arch portico that runs from the Certosa cemetery in Melloncello up to the gates of the shrine of the Madonna of San Luca, which is clearly visible on the Guardia hill above. Although rendering covers the portico’s brickwork, the arches and windows of the Littoriale’s façade blend perfectly. In addition to physically linking the stadium to the shrine above, the portico also connected it to the city’s 14-kilometre network of covered walkways that brought pedestrians to and from the centre. Emphasising the importance of these renowned porticoes with an organic analogy, more than just structurally and even psychologically connecting the Littoriale to the city, those of the main thoroughfares of vias Saragozza and Sant’Isaia acted as the arteries and veins that carried the stadium’s lifeblood to and from the city.

The harmonisation and physical connection of the stadium to the city’s portico network was completed by the construction of the monolithic, six-storey, 42-metre Marathon Tower. Designed by Arata, it was commissioned by Arpinati immediately after the stadium’s opening ceremony in October 1926. Towers in general were striking symbolic features of Fascist architecture that, according to Tim Benton, represented ‘a combination of the medieval civic tower and an abstract symbol of authority’ to which ‘the

101 Inglis, *Football Grounds of Europe*, p.33. San Pietro measures the portico at 2km with 666 arches.
typical Fascist arengario, usually in the form of a projecting balcony’ was attached.\(^{102}\) Even the most modest municipal buildings possessed a torre del Littorio, while Marathon towers were an unavoidable feature of many stadia built in this period. In 1928, as part of his non-technical vision of the Fascist city, the journalist and romantic novelist Ridolfo Mazzucconi similarly stressed the important role of towers in the Fascist city: It ‘will be a city of towers and of high palaces…. the tower expresses in a sublime mode the divine audacity of man’.\(^{103}\)

Up until the construction of the Marathon Tower there had been a slight gap between the stadium’s perimeter wall and the San Luca portico, which the new construction was intended to mediate. While reflecting Bologna’s many medieval towers, the Marathon Tower also fulfilled a propaganda role by reaffirming the Romanesque aesthetic that Arpinati was intent on imposing. Its central arch was also positioned precisely above a plaque on the portico wall commemorating the execution of Father Ugo Bassi by an Austrian firing squad, on 8 August 1849. The nationalist and regenerationist connection was made once again, one L’Assalto journalist hoping that Bassi’s spirit might have been released during the stadium’s inauguration: ‘I love to think that on 29 May the patriotic spirit of the Barnabite might have floated, finally placated, blessing it!!’\(^{104}\) From the internal perspective the Tower’s propaganda role was further served by a large arch, opposite the covered stand where dignitaries would have sat, which contained a huge bronze statue of the Duce in heroic pose, on horseback. [see Appendix I, Fig 10 & 11]

While the practical elements of the stadium were important, its aesthetic further stimulated the debate as to what actually constituted Fascist art and architecture. Fascism was too eclectic to be restricted to any particular style or genre and many intellectuals agreed with Giorgio Pini, the director of L’Assalto and one of the leading figures in the Bolognese Fascist Syndicate of Journalists, who argued that ‘a new art, strictly tied to the fascist rebirth, undoubtedly needs to affirm itself’.\(^{105}\) Naturally, as one of Fascist Italy’s biggest and most high profile structures, the Littoriale became a central protagonist in the debate. Some argued that, as an apparently Fascist work, it contradicted itself by reflecting the splendour of Roman amphitheatres. Others saw the opposite and drew attention to its inherent Futurist influences. Somewhere in between was the third way option in which, once again,

\(^{103}\) R. Mazzucconi, La Città Fascista. Il governo fisico degli abitati secondo alcuni nuovi principi di politica edilizia, Grosseto, Maremma, 1928, p.84.
\(^{104}\) ‘Dopo il trionfo’, L’Assalto, 4/6/27, p.3.
\(^{105}\) ‘Considerazioni sul “Littoriale”’, L’Assalto, 23/4/27, p.3.
establishing what was not intrinsically Fascist appears to have been the key to deciding what actually was.

As Pini further argued: ‘the “Littoriale” does not represent a Roman return neither a preface to the coming architectural futurism. One is talking of a perfect work of actual fascist art, a document of our era, an affirmation of a civilisation and style that stands alone, a classic expression of a classic regime.’ His albeit personal and subjective opinion that declared it ‘a monument that future generations will remember as the titanic force of Fascist Italy’, was nonetheless prescient. He also suggested that the Littoriale represented Fascist civilisation, without actually deciding what this constituted, which exemplified how the lumpy contradictions of such opposite schools of thought as romanità, futurism and modernism, were often pushed through the Fascist cultural processor and blended to a satisfactory consistency, without actually resulting in the emergence of anything particularly new. As Ivo Bonuzzi explained, the truth about the Littoriale:

reveals itself, to who thinks about it, as a typically fascist work...the clearest of lines appear as a sign of our times, which is an achievement that reflects, synthesises, expresses the force, the beauty and the greatness of a victorious Regime, through the constant testimony of its most significant monuments.

Irrespective of its architectural and aesthetic merits, if the stadium was to truly reflect the genius of the regime and the greatness of the era, it needed a suitably descriptive name that was acceptable to Mussolini. However, like the arguments surrounding Fascist art, this proved equally polemical. From its conception, the press had generally referred to the Littoriale as the Campo Polisportivo or occasionally as la Mole Arpinatiana, in respect to both its huge size and the role of Arpinati. To establish a more permanent name, Arpinati turned for inspiration to Professor Baldoni, a Latinist. Despite its Roman and Fascist connotations, ‘Littoriale’, his first proposal after two months contemplation, left most of the Bologna hierarchy completely underwhelmed. Although acceptable to Arpinati the name was deemed too broad for something with such a specific purpose, even though the brief had apparently referred to the potential themes of fascio and littorio.

Returning to basics, Baldoni questioned what exactly the stadium was about, what was its purpose, its essence? His answer was: ‘the place where one develops and tempers the nobility of the spirit and body of the new race, which is the fascist race.’ From this, he

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106 Ibid., p.3.
107 “Il Littoriale”, L’Assalto, 3/7/26, p.3
108 Bonuzzi, Le Grandi Realizzazioni, p.4.
formed what he considered to be the perfect solution. Deriving from a mixture of Greek and Latin - like the stadium’s architecture - while sounding Roman, he proposed the single word of ‘Eugenéo’, supporting it with an almost algebraic formula:

“eu’=good, and “genes”=stock, progeny, descent, race. And the composed word “eugenés” acquires the significance: “of good stock”, “of noble race.” Thus when we say “Eugenéo”, we signify precisely, and with exact literal sense, “the place (implicit) of the good stock, of the noble race.”

Baldoni also suggested that so unusual was the name, there was no need to specify the building was in Bologna, as there had no been need to say the Colosseum was in Rome.

His proposal interpreted the essence of what Fascism was trying to achieve through sport: that being the creation of a strong race in facilities that reflected the regime’s modern vision and ancient cultural heritage. Furthermore, ‘Eugenéo’ was intended to specifically encompass the stadium’s eclectic identity by expressing its strong connections with the Imperial past and the Fascist present in Bologna. Despite his convincing argument, the formulaic proposal was rejected as too erudite for the masses, for which the stadium had been constructed. It was another clear indication of the regime’s desire to avoid anything remotely elitist in its effort to reach mass society.

Arpinati eventually settled for the original suggestion of ‘Littoriale’. It blended the past with the present by referring to the Roman littori (legal officers) whose symbol of power was the same bundle of rods bound up with an axe that had been abducted by the Fascist Party. In fact, Littoriale was so apt, inspirational, or perhaps just safe, that it became a popular name for many Fascist stadia. Either way, Arpinati’s creation had a name and it was time to put it to work.

**Putting Bologna on the map**

The regime’s desire to restructure and reorder Italian cities along Fascist lines was a significant factor in the design of all new stadia, one of the greatest concerns being the efficient control of the increasingly large and threatening crowds that were attending football matches. With significant attention having been paid to the arrival, entry and exit of supporters, L’Assalto claimed the Littoriale had resolved many of the old problems and indeed, it appeared to have done so. The size of the stadium combined with the large crowds that were expected to attend was one reason for its construction in the suburban southwest of Bologna. Quick, easy and orderly access to and from the city centre for football

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110 Ibid., p.1.
111 ‘La struttura del campo’, L’Assalto, p.3.
supporters and attendees of the many fairs and shows that it was expected to host, had been a primary consideration in the planning process. Around the stadium, 3,000 vehicle parking spaces were created, L.222,216 were spent on road improvements, and two new tram lines were laid along vias Saragozza and Sant'Isaia.\(^{112}\)

The first significant test was the stadium’s inauguration on 31 October 1926. Marking the fourth anniversary of the Fascist rise to power, Mussolini chose to attend the event, which, according to Il Carlino, provoked ‘heart-felt jubilation in all of the city’.\(^{113}\) While the huge crowd tested the Littoriale’s ability to cope with major events, the inauguration also demonstrated its capacity to bestow considerable domestic and international prestige upon the party, the city and the regime. However, the Duce’s 24-hours in Bologna, from 30-31 October, were memorable not so much for the mass spectacle of the opening ceremony but for the assassination attempt that launched the beginning of dictatorship.

After entering the stadium on horseback, Mussolini was saluted with a display of waved handkerchiefs by the various male and female Fascist groups, avanguardisti (ONB members aged 15-18), balilla, syndicate members and general public from all over Italy. L’Assalto’s account of the day drew another analogy with the Roman Empire before alluding to how the stadium had further united Italy:

> When...we saw the mighty Duce enter like a conductor of people, bathed in the light of the sun that had finally driven away the clouds, greeted by a mass that only eternal Rome will have seen paying tribute to the “triumph” and a victorious Consul, we truly thought that the hearts of all Italians must have been beating with his.\(^{114}\)

Despite this grand recollection, Mussolini’s stay at the Littoriale was brief, with only a few words for the waiting crowd. Nonetheless, it was enough for L’Assalto to inform its readers that: ‘whoever participated in that mystic, warlike, poetic and solemn inaugural ritual, as no other fascist ceremony has ever been, cannot forget the emotion of that moment.’\(^{115}\)

Having awarded some medals, Mussolini led the crowd on horseback to piazza Vittorio Emanuele, in the heart of the city. As he departed along the via Indipendenza towards the station, pistol shots were fired at his car. A 13-year-old in avanguardista (youth group) uniform, Anteo Zamboni, was apprehended and attacked by the crowd before being lynched in the street: ‘his body, full of revolver bullets and knife wounds, was torn to pieces, and his arms and legs were carried around the city in triumph by the Fascists.’\(^{116}\) L’Assalto

\(^{112}\) ACSB, Ex-Casa del Fascio I, PG 12736, 9/4/28.
\(^{113}\) ‘Il Duce a Bologna’, Il Resto del Carlino, p.4.
\(^{115}\) ‘Un’opera grandiosa’, Il Littoriale, 29/5/27, p.3.
proclaimed the crowd’s reaction as a proud moment that reflected the city’s strong sense of identity and values: ‘To our credit for this reason, the summary and immediate execution of the attacker paints and outlines our impetuous and straight character that knows to reward virtue and inexorably punishes cowardice and guilt.’ Despite such pride, the exact details of the incident remain unclear and there is little incontrovertible evidence to justify Zamboni’s summary execution, other than an inconclusive note that he apparently wrote the night before.¹¹⁸

The suspicion remains that he was the unfortunate victim of a faked assassination attempt that provided the regime with an opportunity to crack down hard on dissent, but nobody in government seemed too interested in ascertaining the facts. Turati had already decided that those complicit in the attack against ‘Italy’, rather than just Mussolini, would be punished. This did not necessarily involve anybody in Bologna, as L’Assalto identified the complicit as those in general opposition to the regime: ‘We need to strenuously defend ourselves and our Head against them: because today he signifies Italy, possessing all of its virtues and interpreting all of its needs.’¹¹⁹

Ad-hoc retribution was immediately taken throughout the country. Socialist and other opposition party offices were burnt in Milan, while in Rome, Genoa, Naples and Cagliari, socialist and liberal houses were broken into and their occupants threatened. ‘Legal’ retribution followed within the week, the Council of Ministers passing a number of decrees that created special powers to suppress subversive anti-fascist activity. The net result was the closure of socialist and opposition press, the expulsion of socialist deputies from the Chamber, the internment of suspected anti-fascists and the restoration of the death penalty for any would-be assassins of the monarch or the head of government. The decrees reflected L’Assalto’s earlier demand for the strongest measures possible and their complete acceptance by society: ‘Today we cannot yet know what decisions the Grand Council will take, something one needs to think about and affirm; they need to be accepted and followed without any more discussion. Today the best word is still “obey”.’¹²⁰ Perhaps it was all an unfortunate coincidence, but the juxtaposition of the opening ceremony for one of Fascism’s greatest creations for the people, with the repressive legislation that followed, is indicative of

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¹¹⁸ Ridley, Mussolini, p.183.
a regime that demanded the utmost loyalty from the nation in return for material improvements and leisure-time opportunities.

As leader of the Bologna fascio and thus responsible for the organisation of the day, Arpinati might have expected the worst for his career prospects. Quite the opposite was the case, which adds further weight to the conspiracy theory. On behalf of Bolognese Fascism, the Duce sent him a message to confirm both his enjoyment of the inauguration and how the incident had not soured a memorable event:

I want to renew my joy and applause for the unforgettable display of yesterday; Bolognese Fascism was, as ever, at the height of its glorious tradition, of its completed works, of future power...it is truly the architrave of Italian Fascism.

I will never forget the spectacle of the Littoriale, I believe in the history of Italy there was never such a perfect adhesion between the Regime and the people; never was there a more formidable collection of people in spirit. One can say without exaggeration that the forest of muskets obscured the sun while I felt and received the throb of the endless multitudes.

The criminal episode of the last minute does not darken the glory of the day.

I send you the fascia mauriziana lacerated by the bullet: you should conserve it among the relics of Bolognese Fascism. More than just a national monument, the incident demonstrated the Littoriale’s unavoidable and unenviable role in Italian Fascist politics.

As if the pomp and grandeur of the stadium’s inauguration had not been enough, there was also the first international football match to celebrate on 29 May 1927. It was played against Spain in the presence of the heir to the Spanish throne, Prince Don Alfonso, whose two-and-a-half day visit to Italy included a number of events, dinners and receptions, during which the advances of city life under Fascism were put on display. With Bologna decorated in the countries’ national colours, the Italian King gave Alfonso the keys of the city. According to Bonuzzi, it confirmed not only the warmth of his welcome but also the ‘affinity of temperament that exists between the two peoples, sons of Rome’. The international fixture had significance beyond simply calcio and the stadium. It was one of the many opportunities for the regime to stress the apparent bonds of race and friendship between the two nations. Nonetheless, calcio was clearly being employed as both a diplomatic barometer of Fascist Italy’s foreign relations and a medium through which the regime hoped to build and reinforce friendships.

In the pre-match information published in L’Assalto, the FIGC invited citizens to come and help ‘solemnise the welcome to the illustrious guests that wanted to honour with their presence the celebration of a ritual, the ritual of our blood and of our race that renews

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121 'Il messaggio del Duce al Fascismo bolognese', L'Assalto, 6/11/26, p.3.
122 I. Luminasi, Il Littoriale, Mareggiani, Bologna, 1927, p.23
itself eternally'. This somewhat Futurist belief in the regenerative qualities of Fascist society would have been more suited to the Littoriale's earlier and more secular inauguration when, in the presence of the Duce, guests were officially invited to 'Fascistically consecrate' the new stadium that was decorated with a vast amount of Fascist iconography. Perhaps reflecting the presence of the Spanish, Catholic heir, there was a more religious aspect to the first international match; the Cardinal Archbishop blessing the pitch and sprinkling it with lustral water.

Figures for the number of spectators varied from 50-70,000. Although it is difficult to verify these the Littoriale's capacity was almost certainly exceeded, thereby questioning the suggestion that such masses had been controlled by Fascist stadium design. With overcrowding forcing thousands of fans, that were unable to reach their seats, to remain in the walkway beneath the stands, reality proved it was not so easy to control and manipulate such huge amorphous masses as the theory had suggested.

Besides demonstrating the stadium's significant contribution to the local economy, the event signalled the Littoriale's arrival as a venue of international importance that put the city, nation and regime in the limelight. Its sporting baptism also brought the emerging Italian team to international attention, its victory justifiably interpreted as a sign of calcio's significant improvement. Yet, as Ivo Luminasi appreciated: 'We have still not reached the final and most significant target. And it is for this that the azzurri...point decisively, in the not too distant future, to a higher goal and a most sought-after victory: that of the Olympics.'

The Littoriale, Bologna and Fascist Italy all basked in the glory of the match, L'Assalto going so far as to suggest that even the sun was Italian that day. Most importantly, the azzurri had 'shown the world how “Mussolini’s Italians” also know how to vie in “constructive power” with their antecedents, Caesar’s Romans....Could Italian unity have had a more symbolic consecration?'

Understandably keen to maximise the day’s significance, domestic publications such as L’Assalto, Il Resto del Carlino and La Gazzetta all found space for reportedly positive foreign reaction. One example was the apparently respected German journalist Walter

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123 L'Assalto, 'La Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio, pubblica, per la fausta ricorrenza, il seguente manifesto', 28/5/27, p.3.
124 ACSB, CA X, 3, 5, 1927, Official invitation to opening of Littoriale.
125 'Un primato', Il Resto del Carlino, 31/5/27, p.4.
127 'Dopo il trionfo', L'Assalto, p.3.
Bandermann. He vouched not only for the quality of the azzurri's play against Spain but also for the spectacular nature of the event itself that, in his opinion, eclipsed the 1924 Olympic football final in Paris. The Barcelona daily Vanguardia was also said to have praised the achievements of Italian sport in general, but especially that of Bologna for having given the nation the biggest and grandest stadium in Europe:

"Bologna...has the glory of being one of the toughest ramparts of the Italian fascist movement and the pride of having provided the norms to shape the fascist belief in a construction programme.... The Littoriale is a symbol of the ideal of physically improving a nation that fascism made itself, deciding that sport needs to be valued as a school of discipline and a gymnasium of courage and strength, two converging elements, fertile for individual and collective fruits."

The sporting attitude of the Italian fans was also apparently recognised by the Spanish press, which was then used as evidence of Fascism's successful campaign to spiritually and morally educate the masses. Certainly the regime was always keen that its representatives portrayed an image of 'fair play', even if, when necessary, this contradicted reality. Fascism's image abroad was important and the Littoriale was responsible for illustrating the energy and progress of the new era.

Soon after its completion, other communes and countries that were interested in replicating the Littoriale began to request information. Allesandria, Padua and Genoa soon formulated plans to develop their own versions, Turin used it to help design the Stadio Mussolini, while the Portuguese Football Federation asked the Italian Consulate for photographs and details to show the authorities what was possible.

After winning the right to host the 1934 World Cup tournament, the Littoriale became one of the jewels in the regime's publicity campaign. As recognised by the Italian Consulate in Vigo, it was a golden opportunity to highlight the country's progress under the Fascism:

Certainly one of the elimination matches will be played at Bologna, in the Littoriale. For this I turn to...[the Mayor]. to send me some photographs of the Stadium, of the swimming pool etc with information and details of all services for the press and players, the capacity of the Littoriale etc - all of the publicity material necessary for the purpose.

While the tournament naturally brought Italian stadia into the spotlight, foreign interest was not ephemeral. Some eight years after its construction, in March 1935, the Mayor of Madrid requested photographs and copies of the stadium plans as part of a study

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128 Luminasi, Il Littoriale, p.28.
129 Ibid., p.24.
130 Ibid., p.30.
131 ACSB, CA X, 3, 5, PG 6949, 31/1/30.
132 ACSB, CA X, 3, 5, PG 1095, 'R. Consolato D'Italia', 6/1/34.
into building a similar venue in the Spanish capital. One of the crucial factors in its enduring appeal was the Littoriale’s multisport design that enabled it to host a number of international sporting events. These included the previously mentioned European swimming championships in 1927 that further spread the reputations of Arpinati, the city and the regime. As the event’s programme stated:

The multiports stadium built in two years...by Leandro Arpinati, deputy of Bologna, is the superb expression of the active vigour of Bolognese fascism and of the new impulse given to athletic sports in Italy.

Bologna and Italy owe much recognition to Mr. Arpinati...who knew how to carry out the work with tenacity...reuniting the majesty of the monumental Roman tradition and impetus towards a renewed physical and spiritual dynamism.

In this way, international events were exploited as propaganda opportunities both at home and abroad, the domestic market again being reminded of how the regime’s restoration of Roman greatness was apparently strengthening Fascist Italy’s reputation abroad. As Vita Nuova further illustrated:

...through the centuries of ups and downs and pain, the great Latin imperial spirit that built the Colosseum survived in the descendant craftsmen of the Littoriale....

Italian sport, especially now, following its many sporting and organisational successes...has acquired great credit abroad....

The fruit of this credit is the concession to organise sporting contests of the highest international value.

Due to competition from other countries with longer sporting histories and a general, somewhat chauvinistic, disbelief that one of the world’s lesser sporting nations was capable of organising prestigious events, Italy had great difficulty acquiring the rights to host international tournaments. Consequently, the swimming championships were not only crucial for the regime to publicise the quality of its athletes and its commitment to sport, but they were also an opportunity to convince those who doubted its organisational skills. If anybody remained unconvinced, Vita Nuova confirmed the ‘facts’:

Italy has organised the contest that was conceded to Bologna, and Bologna has passed the test in such a brilliant way as to excite admiration from the most expert and difficult foreigners that watched the tournament.... The main thing is that all the foreigners admired without limitation the enormous work of Arpinati, that graces Bologna, Fascism and Italy; that they might have returned to their countries with a better memory of Italian hospitality, taking with them prizes upon which the sign of the Littorio has been embossed.

134 ACSB, CA X, 3, 5, PG 9771, 11/3/35.
135 Comité Organisateur des Championnats de Natation, Plongeons et Water Polo, (ed.) Bologne et le Littoriale, pp. 25-27.
137 Ibid., p.601.
Prestigious international sporting events were not the only way for the regime to publicise its capabilities. In addition to Bologna Sportiva’s important development work within the local community, its football section became an international flagship for both the city and the regime. So important was it that, besides playing home matches in the Littoriale, the club also received generous grants and tax breaks from the commune. Exploiting its first *scudetto* in 1925, the club’s initial request for financial help to overcome problems partly connected to an unpaid bill for communal rates in 1922-23, referred heavily to its role in Bologna’s local identity:

As you know Bologna FC, holding the Italian Football Championship, lifts the name of Bologna, and to continue its victories in the name of its city, finds itself in a very needy economic condition, not only due to the enormous daily costs that each football squad meets, but also due to the burdens of holding the greatest honorary title in sport.\(^{138}\)

Claiming that many communes encouraged their local squads with fiscal exemptions or financial aid, BFC requested a grant to help it continue its ‘educational and patriotic work’ and hold ‘the name of Bologna high in the field of sport.’\(^{139}\) Hoping for a loan that would ‘allow it to confront, with the least amount of worry, the tough struggle to hold onto the greatest title of champions of Italy’,\(^{140}\) the commune’s response was a somewhat disappointing L.2,000. Unabashed, the president requested more money the following year when the club’s financial position had failed to improve.

In the intervening period Arpinati had become Podestà and this time the administration stretched to a donation of L.5,000.\(^{141}\) Buoyed by the change in leadership or perhaps genuinely in need, the president requested further assistance six months later, if the club was to fulfil its ambassadorial role:

*Reasons of healthy local pride force us to ask for the Commune’s support for the football Society of “BOLOGNA” that with many sacrifices, competing in vigorous sporting battles... had the prize of an extremely gratifying success in the name of our city.... While the Fascist Government has encouraged and provided for sporting events as elements of propaganda and for the physical improvement of the Italian people... we dare to hope that our appeal will be successful and that our city will respond adequately to common expectations.*\(^{142}\)

Despite the club’s appeal and the Podestà’s affiliation, budgetary restrictions prevented Arpinati from committing the commune to a further grant, although he did promise to consider the issue at the next budget talks.\(^{143}\) He was as good as his word and when the


\(^{139}\) Ibid., p.2.

\(^{140}\) ASCB, CA X, 3, 5, PG.16307, 14/6/26.

\(^{141}\) ASCB, CA X, 3, 5, PG 2504, 22/2/27.

\(^{142}\) ASCB, CA X, 3, 5, PG 2504, 7/10/27.

\(^{143}\) ASCB, CA X, 3, 5, PG 33307, 11/10/27.
The commune only recommended retaining the L.5,000 contribution, he justified the club’s case by explaining its importance to the city:

...such a figure is inadequate not only for the needs of the said Society, but also for the importance that its activities and its performances have acquired in the city’s sporting life.

It is also held, by news of various other communes, that the development of local sporting institutions in general and football in particular is encouraged differently elsewhere, which is not so much by considering the material impetus from city commerce as favouring the healthy training of youth in the same interests of the nation.144

His impassioned plea saw the grant increased to L.20,000, thereby indicating either Arpinati’s great influence within the commune, or its recognition of the importance of the team’s continued success. The truth may rest somewhere in between the two, but the club president was clearly aware of its bargaining power and used this to regularly beg funds; always citing its contribution to Bologna’s cultural and economic life in the process:

[The] squad that defends the city’s colours, makes a notable contribution to tourism and, consequently, to commercial consumption on matchdays when a crowd of fans that consume and spend, flock from the neighbouring centres and exceptionally also from notable distance.145

In 1930, the commune gave the club L.10,000 in the hope that it could stimulate more activity and prosperity at the underused Littoriale.146 It was the municipality’s final payment as its own financial difficulties ended all subsidies to charitable and cultural institutions thereafter.147 Bologna FC’s main financial drain was the cost of maintaining a squad capable of competing at the highest level of Italian football, considerable sums of money being spent on players’ wages or ‘expenses’. These ranged from L.300-3,000 per month at an annual sum of around L.450,000, excluding team win bonuses of L.70,000.148 Despite the commercial benefits of success, there was still the heavy expense of attracting the best players. In 1931-32, this accounted for L.858,465 of the club’s spending that was set against L.271,000 recouped in sales; a net cost of almost L.600,000.149

Naturally a successful team attracted more spectators and bigger gate receipts that increased four years out of five, from 1927-32. However, the financial rewards of success must be compared to the not insignificant costs. During the 1930-32 seasons, this amounted to L.377,000 spent on new players alone. Even such expenditure did not guarantee success, although Bologna’s 1932 Central European Cup win did add L.500,000 to the coffers.150

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144 ACSB, CA X, 3, 5, PG 30737, 29/8/28.
145 ACSB, CA X, 3, 5, PG 20885, 7/6/30.
146 ACSB, CA X, 3, 5, PG 22003, 14/6/30.
147 ACSB, CA X, 3, 5, PG 33374, 26/10/31.
149 Ibid., pp.1-2.
150 Ibid., Allegato N.1, ‘Riassunto Bilanci dal 1927/8 al 1932-33’.

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might appear good business, but takings were notoriously too fickle to be relied upon as bad weather and bad performances often had drastic effects. Moreover, even an increase in income was a double-edged sword, with over 31 per cent lost to opposition teams, taxation and the league.\(^{151}\)

After investigating Bologna’s plight, the commune agreed the club was in financial difficulty. Having only made two annual profits in the previous six seasons it was running a debt of L.562,000, of which L.300,000 was owed to the Bank of Rome.\(^{152}\) Accepting this and recognising the club’s albeit ‘modest’ contribution to the city’s tourist industry, the commune set the rent for Bologna FC’s use of the Stadio Littoriale at one Lira per year, for the next one to two years.\(^{153}\) Irrespective of the unquantifiable financial benefits for the city, such decisions by the local authority were justified by a team that made regular repayments in kind and prestige. After Bologna’s first championship victory in 1925, the titles, accolades and prestige continued to amount. One notable example came in 1929 at the PNF stadium in Rome, when the club secured its second *scudetto* with a 1-0 victory over Torino, in front of the Duce.\(^{154}\)

Reduced to nine players, Bologna’s impressive stamina was testimony to the work of the coach Dr. Fellsner. Having studied physical education he introduced modern training techniques to the Italian game that reflected the core ethics of Fascist sport; the desire to win and the refusal to concede defeat. Most interestingly, Leone Boccali argued in *Lo Sport Fascista* that Bologna’s achievement showed how representing one’s city could be a healthy and intense motivation that should not necessarily result in a dangerous increase in *campanilismo*:

Bologna won worthily, because when the final turned completely against it, the team found a ruthless will to win. But to speak of will is to say little: one is talking of conscience, of spirit of body, of a healthy love for the home town....Salaries and victory prizes are all important for the red and blue players, but they never lost sight of, neither did they cease to appreciate, the moral value of the Title they wanted to win.\(^{155}\)

Even Arpinati, the supposedly neutral head of the FIGC, was not immune to such sentiments and took himself straight to the Bologna dressing room where he exchanged affectionate embraces with all of the players. Impartial or otherwise, his joy was understandable given his commitment to *calcio* in his home town. According to Boccali, the


\(^{152}\) *Ibid.*, p.3.


team's achievements were the principal reasons for Bologna regaining its position among the most important cities of Italy: 'A great family that understands all of the city is "Bologna Sportiva", of which the football eleven, with the recent victory, has renewed the prestige of an already great reputation.'

At a banquet organised for the players by Bologna supporters, even Arpinati accepted that campanilismo was an acceptable motivational force, so long as it did not become destructive. Citing his own 'neutrality', he argued that his two year federal leadership had: already given the Italian public the impression that something had changed, soon all will need to be convinced that there is no club of the heart for the federal president.... At this moment it is not the honourable Arpinati who is talking to you, but the rigid applicatore of the federal rule. Of course, Il Littoriale had no interest in portraying anything other than his impartiality, which Calcio Illustrato also reaffirmed: Arpinati 'has never in fact hidden his passion for Bologna; but he has always known how to put a formidable barrier between his intimate passion and his role as chief arbiter'. His apparently healthy and committed support for his team was held up as an example to all.

In a number of diverse ways, the phenomenon of calcio in Bologna came to reflect the regime's politicisation and exploitation of the game on a domestic and international level, the full extent of the team's impact abroad being considered in a following chapter. Clearly Arpinati was the driving force behind calcio in Bologna and despite apparently honourable motives, he seems to have been well aware of the national benefits that both he and the city would gain from success. As one of the regime's most publicised architectural projects, the Littoriale stadium represented not only the beginning of Fascism's investment in sporting infrastructure, but also the architectural politics of the era. This becomes even more evident when compared with the new stadium built in Florence only six years later.

Despite the monumental size of the Littoriale, the attempt to augment the city's status in the national arena through calcio still required a team worthy of the stadium. For this reason the commune, often under Arpinati's influence, offered Bologna FC as much financial support as possible. In turn, this strengthened the local identity and sentiments of campanilismo as the team became one of the best in Italy. Ironically, it was exactly what the regime had been trying to avoid, despite using Bologna's 1929 championship victory to show how it was possible to love both one's city and country. Of course, the reality was different.

155 'Il Bologna e il campionato', Lo Sport Fascista, 7, 1929, p.16.
156 Ibid., p.17.
158 'Arpinati', Calcio Illustrato, p.3.
As will be seen, Bologna's international achievements were so significant that, however strong its local identity, the club was unable to avoid having its name, status and reputation highjacked by the regime.

In these ways Bologna FC, the city and the stadium further exemplified the natural dilemmas and contradictions that confronted the regime following its investment in calcio, which is reinforced by comparison with Florence. Whereas the local party's involvement in grass roots politics, through the medium of sport, resulted in the construction of a Romanesque stadium inspired by the regime's self-professed Imperial roots, Florence did the opposite. Not only did this represent the radical nature of its local party, but it also showed how within Fascist society there was room for individuality, even if the regime did not quite know how to deal with it.
6. Radical Florence: The Cradle of Calcio

Unlike many other European languages, no literal or phonetic translation of the English word ‘football’ exists in Italian, which reflects calcio’s strong local traditions and its particular Italian identity that derives from the medieval game of calcio fiorentino. Played in Florence from the sixteenth century onwards, some have argued that this was in fact the original format of the modern game of football. Others dispute this and attribute the import of the modern version of association football, at the end of the nineteenth century, to Swiss, Austrian and German engineers, technicians or merchants.¹

Whichever of these theories for the origins of calcio is accepted, there can be no questioning the long-term Florentine fascination with the medieval format of the game that blossomed once again under Fascist rule. Also thanks to the initiative of local Fascist leaders, Florence acquired a football team that competed in the new national league in an architecturally radical stadium that reflected the city’s proud connection with the game as much as its avant-garde local party.

Strangely enough for a city that claims to have been the cradle of calcio, AC Fiorentina arrived relatively late on the scene, in 1926. The date is nonetheless very significant as it relates to the regime’s national ‘normalisation’ campaign in which both the local Florentine Fascist Party and calcio were reorganised, the latter being rationalised in Florence and cities across the peninsula. This is not to say that Florence had been without any football teams up until this point, but what it had lacked was a force capable of representing and uniting the resources of the entire city. The formation of Fiorentina from a merger of the two principal Florentine clubs achieved this and soon sparked demands for a stadium worthy of the team and the city. The place of worship for Fiorentina fans, this new construction also needed to reflect the city’s strong independent identity that derived from its central role in the renaissance and was being revitalised by Fascism. The resulting stadium put Fiorentina and the city on the Italian sporting map, while the international prestige from its innovative design helped spread the reputation of radical Florentine Fascism throughout Europe. It was not simply a one-off example of modernism either, as the Giovanni Berta

reflected the type of avant-garde architecture that the Florence-based ‘Tuscan group’ was famous for. By reflecting the type of independence that Florentines had expressed for hundreds of years, the stadium further intensified the city’s already strong sense of identity. Combined with the team, this contributed to the formation of a Florentine Fiorentina family that waved the city’s fleur-de-lis banner with greater vigour than ever before.

Ridolfi realises the dream

The driving force behind the merger and the rejuvenation of Florentine sport was the Marquis Luigi Ridolfi Vay da Verazzano, the youngest member of an old and noble Tuscan family and the first president of Fiorentina. Despite his aristocratic local roots that extended as far back as Lorenzo the Magnificent, Ridolfi involved himself in Florentine sport to benefit popular ends and equip the city to rival those of the north. Many of his ideas were stimulated by his connections with the emerging Futurist groups within the city, among which he befriended the artist and intellectual Ardegno Soffici and the movement’s leader Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. A formative period in his life, it was through such contacts that he discovered a strong passion for movement and speed that developed his interest in sport and shaped many of the projects, beliefs and interests that punctuated his career. In fact, some of his ideas and plans for the improvement of calcio were so imaginative that they only came to fruition during the last ten years of the twentieth century.

Ridolfi’s first sporting passion was athletics and as leader of the Florentine ASSI Giglio Rosso club he guided it to renowned national and international successes, which was exactly the type of profile and reputation that he hoped to establish for AC Fiorentina. Like Bologna FC’s president Renato dall’Ara, Ridolfi’s career spanned both the Fascist and the post war democratic eras. Their careers are arguably examples of what Ruth Ben-Ghiat has termed the ‘collective complicity’ that ‘made it difficult to defascistize Italian culture after World War II.’

Having been president of both Fiorentina and the Florentine Provincial Fascist Federation (1926-29), Ridolfi’s post-Fascist career was particularly interesting. As Fiorentina’s head, he worked closely with leading PNF cultural figures and the city mayors, Giuseppe Della Gherardesca and Alessandro Pavolini, to promote and develop the club and other Florentine sports associations. According to Andrea Galluzzo’s biography, he was ‘one

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2 Ben-Ghiat, Fascist Modernities, p.10.
of the rare, truly enlightened personalities, who, during the twenty years of fascism and...also in more recent and brighter times of the free republic, was blessed by that indispensable political power that allowed only him to realise the most ambitious projects.\(^3\)

Not surprisingly, with high profile contacts who were supporters of the club, Fiorentina was closely linked to the local Fascist Party. After transferring its offices to the local Casa del Fascio in 1929, all society members were given free membership plus reductions in certain bars and restaurants in town.\(^4\)

Ridolfi’s principal skill was apparently as a mediator capable of bridging the gap that had so often resulted in strong local personalities defending their own interests rather than uniting to develop the city as a whole. It was a prominent feature of all his achievements that was most likely facilitated by his blend of noble origins and Fascist party membership. Either way, Ridolfi was instrumental in uniting Florence during the Fascist era. The city’s disunity and capacity for infighting had preoccupied local and national Fascist leaders since Tullio Tamburini’s rise to prominence launched inter-party conflict between the radical intransigents and the more conservative integrationalist revisionists.\(^5\) It was a serious dispute that reflected a crisis of support for the regime at the local level, which Adrian Lyttelton has interpreted in terms of ‘a cleavage between “elite Fascism” and “mass Fascism”’.\(^6\)

Such revisionist/revolutionary disputes that essentially concerned the nature of the party and its future role in society, often erupted in towns and cities with the most radical fasci. One example of how this manifested itself in Florence was the virulent anti-Masonic campaign that began in 1924. According to Lyttelton, it demonstrated the presence of the ‘totalitarian dynamic of “permanent revolution” or at least permanent terror; new enemies were found to replace the old’.\(^7\) The attacks by the local squadristi, which began in September, were not solely against the Florentine Freemasons but also against independent anti-fascist elements of the bourgeoisie, such as members of the University of Florence and magistrates who were thought to protect masons. The attacks preceded a reign of terror that was unleashed upon Florence and the surrounding area in early October. An opportunity for the squads to indulge themselves and for the ras to reassert and further abuse their local

\(^4\) ‘Vita della Fiorentina’, Il Bargello, 27/10/29, p.4.
\(^5\) The intransigents wanted the radical elimination of all non-Fascists from political life while the revisionists urged reconciliation with at least other parties.
\(^6\) Lyttelton, Seizure of Power, p.152.
\(^7\) Ibid., p 281
positions of power, Lyttelton suggests they showed the radical nature of the *fascio* and the way that ‘Florentine Fascists had taken on the air of guardians of the revolution.’

For the purposes of this study the full details of the incident are unnecessary, but when Roberto Farinacci failed to adequately impose order on the locality, Italo Balbo was sent to investigate and bring the local party back under control. While he took measures to ensure such events did not happen again, it was not until 1926 that the Florentine *fascio* was considered to have returned to anything like subservience and the crisis of the party concluded. Somewhat ironically, or perhaps with great significance, it was local party’s weekly publication *Battaglie fasciste* that first demanded the local factions unite in support of the regime. Attacking Farinacci’s legitimisation of the intransigents’ actions and his consequent failure to restore order, Mussolini struck out at the local party and demanded an end to the destructive force of *squadristismo*. Once the internal battles were concluded by the Fascist Grand Council’s secret dissolution of the squads, the *fascio* announced the Duce’s order for the reconstitution of its framework for the future, which was intended to unite the city: ‘Greater than the necessity for struggle and for avant-garde politics, what looms today are works of civil and educational action.’

It was at this point in the city’s history that Ridolfi became secretary of the Federation of Florentine *fasci*. Already well known among local Fascists, having been second in command of the II Florentine Legion during the March on Rome, he was one of the few members of the Italian aristocracy to reach such a position within the party in a major city. As the PNF secretary Turati explained, Ridolfi was specifically appointed to ‘end the factions within Florentine Fascism’. He set to work during his investiture when he appealed for unity and an end to local recriminations and polemics in the city. This was reprinted in the local daily *Il Nuovo Giornale*:

> From today, rancour, discord and factions need no longer exist in the city and the province. Leaders and followers will hear that with the new Party Statutes it wants to open a new style and a concept of duties, of the needs of the individual and the collective that is more adherent to the actual requirements of Fascism, which are vaster and more complex than those past times of glorious political struggles and bloody battles.

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10 Formed in 1924 as the ‘independent’ voice of Florentine Fascism, the weekly was essentially an organ of Tamburini.
13 ‘Monito categorico dell’ on. Augusto Turati’, *Il Nuovo Giornale*, 22/12/26, p.4
Given his preference for sport over politics, the formation of AC Fiorentina in the same year handed Ridolfi a gilt-edged opportunity. Besides addressing Turati’s specific brief to re-launch Fascism in the localities after the early years of crisis, Fiorentina was an opportunity to build a mass popular Florentine institution with no direct history of factional infighting that was capable of providing the social glue that central government believed to have been lacking.

Football within the city had always been keenly contested between the well-known clubs of Palestra Ginnastica Libertas and Club Sportivo di Firenze that had existed since 1870, although not always with a football section. Their rivalry was ferocious and the animosity between the two reflected the city’s ancient Guelf and Ghibelline divisions. Florence had long paid the price for this infighting that prevented any of its representatives from making a national impact. This slowed the development of the local game and the city’s sporting reputation in the process. In fact, as Arpinati had both intended and predicted following the Carta di Viareggio, it was the promotion of Libertas to the first division of the restructured national championship in 1926 that brought the city to its senses. It was this that forced the rationalisation of Florentine football and the merger of Libertas and Sportivo to form AC Fiorentina. Finally, the city had a single representative that possessed the necessary resources to enable a Florentine club to compete on the national stage.

Yet, even at the point where the city had the serious prospect of competing in the national league, so strong were these rivalries that a merger of the two clubs was far from a foregone conclusion. According to Galluzzo, the eventual unification of these two previously warring factions was only ‘thanks to the rigorous censorship exercised by Luigi Ridolfi that suffocated the interminable vitriolic polemics among the old members of Libertas and Club Sportivo’. So strong were these rivalries that one month after the merger had been concluded the new club was apparently still experiencing serious difficulties, which included a general apathy among supporters. As Il Nuovo Giornale made clear, the negativity surrounding Florentine football was serious: ‘Florence, that was the cradle of the noble game...needs to respond enthusiastically to the appeal of the former two societies that, in sacrificing all of their traditions, were affirming something that is truly an enhancement of Italian and Florentine sport.’

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16 'La costituzione dell’Associa. Fiorentina del Calcio è in pericolo!', Il Nuovo Giornale, 1/9/26, p.5.
While Ridolfi proved a talented negotiator and builder of Florentine unity, his success was undoubtedly related to his connections within local society and his genuine belief in the merits of a single club that would put the city on the national arena. Despite this vision, his most important skill was the ability to convey the merits of the merger to the supporters. As one of the more committed Fiorentina fans, Rigoletto Fantappiè explained in 1927:

"Luigi Ridolfi was a man of faith and remained struck by the feeling that for us boys Fiorentina was a faith. The viola squad was an ideal that he shared with us. In that era the fan did not carry much weight, but he showed an exceptional willingness towards us. For him categories did not exist: he spoke with everybody." 17

With such a competitive history between the two teams it is hardly surprising that the unification process did not lack its polemical moments. However, aware of the direction in which the game was moving and the city's recent past, good sense prevailed and the merger of the two clubs was concluded on 19 August 1926. AC Fiorentina's club colours were originally a pragmatic mix of Libertas' red and Club Sportivo's white, with the city's fleur-de-lis adopted as its motif. To further demonstrate the new club's manufactured unity, the board of directors was also pragmatically comprised of five members from each team. In the light of age-old antagonisms within the city, the new unity, as represented by Fiorentina, was deliberately promoted to the point of enforcement, as an attempt was made to construct a symbiotic relationship between the club and the Florentine public. This was perhaps at its strongest and most necessary at the beginning of the 1928-9 season when Fiorentina, competing in group B of the national league, was striving to finish in the top eight to qualify for the first, single national division the following season. With a key role in promoting the club, the Florentine daily La Nazione extended its demand for support to almost every member and institution of local society:

The squad will bear with itself the name of Florence and, accordingly, all of Florence needs to feel entirely the beauty of the responsibility given to the players. However, it is not out of place to repeat...the necessity for public city organisations in general to financially help the local club. It is a requirement of all sportsmen and, we add, of good citizens that truly love the city. 18

Florentine Fascism: A radical party in a radical city

Besides showing the importance to the city of the team's presence in Serie A, La Nazione's statement illustrated the sense of pride in the local party's achievements, in addition to the independence of thought among Florentine intellectuals and the fervent,

18 "L'inizio del campionato del calcio", La Nazione, 30/9-1/10/28, p.5.
radical mood of the Tuscan Fascist squads. This seam of radicalism within the local party was arguably an echo of the fierce challenge that Florentine Fascism had survived and Tamburini’s intransigent colleagues that had deliberately been allowed to remain on the federal board of the fascio, before being removed in time by Ridolfi.\textsuperscript{19} While the fascio still possessed a strong identity its support for the regime was unstinting, as Marco Palla points out: ‘in the years 1927-28 even in Florence the PNF chose the route of subordination to the State, through a guide who conformed with bureaucratic zeal…to detailed addresses from the Prefect and other local centres of power, like the communal and provincial administrations.’\textsuperscript{20} Nonetheless, unlike elsewhere in Fascist Italy, the fascio was not completely subordinated to the state.

Reflecting this undiminished strength of identity, Pavolini’s non conformist avant-garde weekly, Il Bargello, was intent on defending the fascio’s new and radical Fascist orthodoxy, while promoting all that was great about Fascist Florence. Possessing an unashamedly local agenda in general, but towards sport in particular, Pavolini’s first editorial explained that: ‘Il Bargello wants to be a Florentine paper; not an American magazine. Good wine, and above all, our wine.’\textsuperscript{21} Another example of his commitment to radical thinking was his expansion of the University Littoriali sporting contests to include the arts, if not women until 1938.\textsuperscript{22} It formed a cultural Olympics that Arrigo Petacco has described as: ‘a gymnasium of ideas and new forms, even unorthodox, where there was the space to debate and even to doubt.’\textsuperscript{23} This openness to fresh cultural ideas while orienting local policy towards the general concepts of central government gave Fascist Florence and the local party a distinctive radical character that was often expressed through Il Bargello.

This apparent desire for the city to once again return to its radical roots was suitably demonstrated by Pavolini’s nomination as Federal Secretary of the Florentine Federation of the party, on 10 April 1929, at only 25 years of age. Although incredibly young for such a responsible position, Pavolini possessed an extraordinary curriculum vitae, which included participation in the March on Rome as he was in the capital by chance. As a talented tennis player, a prolific and respected journalist and an intellectual with degrees in both law and political science from the University of Florence, he was more than equipped to successfully re-launch the radical traditions of both the city and the local party. In Palla’s opinion

\textsuperscript{19} Palla, Firenze nel regime fascista, pp.167-68.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, p.165.
\textsuperscript{22} de Grazia, How Fascism Ruled women, p.162.
Pavolini’s succession from Ridolfi, who had been imposed by the party to unite the city and bring it back into the national fold, was a sign of the local fascio retaking the path of activism and organisation from which it had been diverted back in 1926. Ridolfi’s support for Pavolini’s nomination tends to support this, while also reflecting Petacco’s suggestion that it was more of a “technical succession” than any sort of a coup.

However, faced with a fait accompli Ridolfi may also have been wisely securing the new Podestà’s support for his future plans, having become clearly preoccupied by the task of developing Florentine sport. By 1930, so considerable had Ridolfi’s portfolio of duties become that Turati pressured him to renounce all of his sporting interests and responsibilities in favour of a full time career in politics. He did the opposite and left party activism for good, after which he remained the central figure in Florentine sport until 1942 when he became president of the FIGC, a position he held until his death in 1957.

In the context of the local party’s recent conformist history and the PNF’s desire to defeat factionalism, the suggestion that Pavolini’s appointment might have been designed to re-radicalise the fascio, may seem strange. However, even Turati was realistic enough to appreciate that it would probably be impossible and certainly impractical, to impose a set of generic norms to which all localities were expected to conform. As he stated in a published address to the Florentine Fascists:

> contrast was inevitable in life: we cannot all be the same, like a column of chanting monks. But we are talking about not losing too much time criticising without curing anything else. It is a matter of not losing ourselves in factional struggle until we destroy the chance to build anything.

His statement further indicated the practical realisation within the PNF that there may indeed have been different routes to Fascism, which allowed the localities to express their identities through individual and albeit acceptable means.

Pavolini had clearly been identified as the best qualified person to rejuvenate the Florentine fascio in a manner that was approved by those in the locality and at the centre of government. Furthermore, as Lyttelton has noted, sport was one of the principal methods by which he was able to achieve this:

> After the great purges of 1925-6, it [Florence] recovered, under Alessandro Pavolini, something of its old aggressive, populist image, especially among youth. Politics was not the only way of raising the temperature and avoiding apathy. Fascism had early and successfully identified itself with sport; the racing driver and the football star were endlessly exalted as the proper models for youth, bold, amoral

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and anti-intellectual. The astute and energetic leader could win a genuine popularity by patronage of his local team.\(^{28}\)

With both Pavolini and Ridolfi equally keen on promoting and developing sport for the benefit of the city, it is hardly surprising they forged a working relationship that was a keystone in the restructure of the local party. In fact, as Turati argued, had it not been for the definite style of cultural politics that their shared sporting interest provided, Pavolini’s attempt to discipline Florentine Fascism may well have failed. The party:

reconquered part of the antique vitality...through the internal restructure and propaganda activism of a restoration programme of the material and intellectual supremacy of the city of Florence that was not lacking the support of long myths and traditions, and that was able to consolidate real exigencies, channel ambitions, strengthen a wider class solidarity and give an outlet to that provincial role, summed up in the formula of “fiorentinismo”\(^{29}\).

Regenerating the city proved to be one of the principal methods by which the \textit{fascio} was able to impose its identity upon Florence and its construction of public buildings was significant in this. Prior to the Fascist injection of enthusiasm for development, Florence had remained more or less structurally unchanged since its heyday in the sixteenth century. However, by the end of the 1800s the city was feeling the constraints of its restrictive walls, narrow streets, increasing population and poor hygiene in certain quarters that, to a degree, had already forced the expansion of its periphery. More recent development had also been stimulated by Florence’s need to face up to its, albeit brief, responsibilities as the capital of Italy, which demanded the construction of adequate accommodation for the government and its functionaries. The move was agreed by the Convention of September, signed by King Vittorio Emanuele II in 1864 as part of the unification process. Denis Mack Smith has suggested that the capital was relocated ‘from Turin to Florence as an indication that Rome was no longer on the agenda’,\(^{30}\) although others believe it was merely a pragmatic move until Rome could finally be acquired.\(^{31}\) Such was the necessary scale of development in Florence that the space within the old city walls was no longer adequate. This made it necessary to “build houses, expropriate buildings, clear roads, widen the city boundaries, improvise extraordinary works…to alter in brief the economy, to change the habits of the entire city and impose new ones on it”\(^{32}\).

\(^{28}\) Lyttelton, \textit{Seizure of Power}, p.303.
\(^{29}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p.183.
In 1865, Giuseppe Poggi was given responsibility for drawing up a city Regulatory Plan that disposed of the old fourteenth century walls and replaced them with public promenades that united the streets both inside and out of the old city centre. The former spatial limitations were removed, somewhat brutally it must be said. Further encouraged by the 1920 Roads and Highways Department plan that declared the open space between the old city and the surrounding hills available for development, the northern end of Florence was ready for change.\(^{33}\)

Poggi’s original expansion plan included the Campo di Marte area. Only just outside of the old city walls, the area of agricultural land that remained a military site until being relinquished for the development of the sport zone, bridged the gap between the ancient centre and the new areas into which Florence was expanding, thereby further encouraging development of the periphery. Although the area remained connected to the military, the first plan to establish an Olympic sized stadium on the site was proposed in 1915.\(^ {34}\) Despite the exigencies of the war years making this impractical, the seed had nonetheless been planted. The war also interrupted the city’s general expansion and while the years of relative economic and political stability in the mid 1920s saw limited Italian construction, it was, somewhat ironically, the international financial crisis of 1929 that stimulated the biggest programme of building works in Italy, as the government sought to alleviate unemployment with public works schemes.

The public works programme complimented Mussolini’s Ascension Day speech in which, railing against the impact of urban overcrowding upon the health of society, he proposed the clearance of the diseased city centres that threatened to sterilise the nation.\(^ {35}\) *Il Popolo d’Italia* further developed the argument, in 1928, by demanding the clearance of city centres by whatever means possible. Its ‘cry’ was to ‘make the exodus from the city centres happen by any means, even coercive - if necessary; hampering with any means, also coercive, the flight from the country; to oppose the wave of immigration into the cities’.\(^ {36}\) The result of this campaign was the demolition and reconstruction of many city centres throughout the peninsula, even if this failed to end urban immigration.

As a clear statement of the regime’s intent to bring life and facilities to Florence’s periphery, which would encourage citizens to leave the overcrowded and unsanitary centre,

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\(^{34}\) FIGC, *Azzurri 1990...Firenze*, p.110.

\(^{35}\) Susmel & Susmel, *Opera Omnia*, p.367.

the Giovanni Berta stadium’s significance extended beyond merely the facilities that it offered. Like the Littoriale in Bologna that had a clear international and domestic propaganda role, the Giovanni Berta signified all elements of the city’s physical, psychological, moral and cultural rebirth. It was hoped this would begin to restore Florence to its Renaissance position of intellectual and cultural primacy in Italy, while also commanding international interest.

Ridolfo Mazzucconi’s earlier cited vision of Fascist urban life also complimented many of the organic, regenerative and almost democratic concepts of the modern city as a social body that was to be cured and looked after for the good of the national whole: ‘The Fascist city will be maternal and hospitable to everybody; even for the workers and the poor, who will need good, pleasant houses that do not make them crave the street or the bar. It will have stadia, theatres, schools, baths and poorhouses.’\(^{37}\) His vision that reflected Fascism’s organic view of the city was complimented by Pavolini’s surgical analogy justifying the need for a new Regulatory Plan:

Thus, to the loving citizen comes the nightmare of the great engineers and famous architects, who, armed with scalpels are ready to carve large, terribly practical cuts in the flesh of this mysterious and delicate creature that is the city....the terror that comes...by following the abstract and scientific fantasy of the rationalised city kills the spirit of our urban “little motherland”. But in reality...such a weapon is absolutely necessary to destroy the microbes and cauterise the infections of a chaotic increase.\(^{38}\)

Not surprisingly, as soon as Pavolini became Podestà, he began work on his vision for Florence, blending its ancient traditions and monuments with a modernist drive that reflected the new socio-political order and the radical nature of Florentine Fascism. Two of the most distinctive buildings constructed as part of this process were the Santa Maria Novella railway station and the Giovanni Berta stadium. Yet while their politicised architecture reflected Florence’s intellectual independence and the radicalism of both the fascio and Pavolini, other critics rejected the construction of such big edifices as more propaganda than a useful indication of the regime tackling the chronic housing shortage. To a certain degree, they had a point.

The first agreement between the railway authorities and the commune had been brokered in 1910, however the war and above all intellectual debate prevented work from beginning in earnest before 1932. The arguments surrounded the rationalist/traditionalist argument that had been raging within intellectual circles regarding the construction of ornate,

\(^{37}\) Mazzucconi, Città Fascista, pp.22-23.
monumental buildings. Essentially, rationalism was a new style with which Fascism was both identifying and imposing itself through art and architecture. Yet while Fascism was undoubtedly modernist and keen not to recreate the imperial type buildings of the past, it never cut all ties with this heritage. Citing the Colosseum as an example of rational architecture, Pier Maria Bardi argued that contrary to the belief that rationalism was a foreign import, it did in fact possess Italian and even Roman roots. Thus, he defined modern rationalist architects as traditionalists who respected an ancient tradition with no servitude to the past: 'The new architects will identify the national life in Mussolini's cities, defined by the rigid military education, by the scope of world supremacy, and by the absolute obedience to the Duce.'

Concurring with Bardi's view, Pavolini rejected Angiolo Mazzoni's original, grandiose and monumental plan on the grounds that the station only needed to be functional. To find an acceptable solution he launched a national competition that invited planners and architects to submit their proposals for the scheme. Among the many rationalist submissions was that of the 'Tuscan group', from the Florence Higher School of Architecture, whose architects and engineers had already constructed a number of buildings in the city that were stylistically and aesthetically significant for the regime. Under Fascism, Florence had become a veritable architectural capital of Italy. Yet, while the majority of these buildings that rose during the 1930s served Fascist ideology and propaganda, they did not necessarily conform to some Fascist mono-style, as aesthetic diversity was a feature of the city's changing skyline.

Among the committee assigned to select the winning proposal, supreme authority rested with Marcello Piacentini. One of Italy's most influential and respected architects, he favoured the proposal of the 'Tuscan group'. Although traditional in his approach, Piacentini was open to new ideas and invited several young architects onto the editorial board of his journal L'Architettura, which was also the publication of the Fascist architects' syndicate, to help redesign and modernise it. More than just indicating the shifting trend in Italian architecture, according to Tim Benton, it indicated how from this point onwards 'the attempt to win favour with Mussolini depended on delicate alliances with the architects in power, and especially with Piacentini'.

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39 P.M. Bardi, Rapporto sull'Architettura (per Mussolini), Roma, Civiltà Fascista, 1931, p.138.
40 For details of the various plans and polemics see Palla, Firenze nel regime fascista, pp.354-62.
41 Ades, Benton etc., Art and Power, p.42.
Despite its collective inspiration, the station project was commonly associated with Giovanni Michelucci; the city’s most high profile architectural figure. The rationalist group, renowned for its stylistic sense of adventure that complimented the radical reputation of the city, proposed a station that courted controversy. Criticisms in the national press objected to both its design and juxtaposition beside the church of Santa Maria Novella, which the group had specifically taken into consideration when drawing up the proposal. Even La Nazione, the official daily mouthpiece of Florentine Fascism, was unable to defend the project unequivocally, although the majority of the local press was resoundingly supportive.

In March 1933 the local Fascist arts and literature periodical L'Universale entered the fray, supporting the project in the editorial of its issue that was dedicated to rational architecture. Defending the style on the basis of eleven different points that were published prominently on its front page, it was point nine that apparently applied to the station: ‘In rational architecture, and only in it, the young recognise the features of the modern Fascist civilisation, rational in politics, economics and agriculture, the civility of reclaimed stadiums and assemblies, a straightforward civilisation that is Imperial.’ It was both interesting and novel to equate rationalist modernism with the era of empire, but nonetheless an approach that mediated the argument between the two. The polemic continued in the following issue where, in the process of stating that it was more than just the station’s good design that made it attractive, L'Universale’s editorial identified all that Italian rationalist Fascist architecture was about and to which the Giovanni Berta also clearly belonged:

Above all it pleases us because it responds to our spirit, because it is synchronised with what we feel is the spirit of the present time; because it seems like a building of another type, for example a monumental station, heavy, scenographic, with one foot in the modern and the other in the antique.

The station was a young, new, fresh, perfect example of rationalist architecture. Committed to ensuring that Michelucci’s project was allowed to go ahead, L'Universale declared it: ‘one of the most vigorous features and elements of Italian and Fascist civilisation.’ The periodical continued to support the proposal by reprinting Giuseppe Pagano’s defence of the outstanding and intrinsically Italian nature of Michelucci’s design. It had already been published in his own architectural magazine Casabella and supported by a large number of prominent architects from both inside and outside of the ‘Tuscan group’.

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44 Ibid., p.1.

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In the meantime, Pavolini prudently awaited the thoughts of Mussolini before wholeheartedly supporting the project. The Duce's approval eventually arrived, although it appears he was more convinced by its architectural merits from the aerial perspective where it appeared to form a giant *fascio littorio*, which the designers maintained was pure accident. It may well have been so but, as Benton has noted, this was the exception more than the rule. Most 'Italian cities still have a fascist railway station and post office; the efficient modern style of these buildings, together with their more or less discreet iconography of fasces, shrines to Fascist martyrs and Italian or Latin inscriptions, entrenched the claims of state propaganda'.

The reception held for the architects at the Palazzo Venezia in 1934, was more than just an indication of Mussolini's approval of the project and the work of the 'Tuscan group' in general. It was also interpreted as a sign that modern architecture had been accepted as the official Fascist style and a public opportunity to defend the architects from ageing members of the Chamber of Deputies. These were led by Farinacci, who opposed both the Santa Maria Novella proposal and the plan to build a Fascist new town at Sabaudia. The Duce's official communication, published in *Il Bargello*, "expressed his satisfaction and his applause that he wanted to extend to the young who sought in architecture and in other fields to realise an art responding to the sensibilities and needs of our Fascist century". However, his statement still failed to categorically resolve the architectural debate surrounding rationalism, modernism and Fascism. As *Il Bargello* clarified: 'He did not intend to defend one tendency and one school against another. But he clearly said that his sympathies and applause go to who endeavours to create in architecture and other fields, an art responding to the needs of our century.' It was an endorsement, if not an emphatic one. However, fully aware there was more than one way of adequately expressing Fascism through art and architecture, the statement ensured all roads remained open to further exploration, thereby enabling the accommodation of such apparently contradictory stadia as the Littoriale and the Giovanni

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47 Ades, Benton etc, *Art and Power*, p.37. (Note 11. Apart from Florence railway station, won in competition among much public controversy by a group of young Florentine architects led by Giovanni Michelucci (1932-34), Ufficio V (a design department in the Ministry of Communications) and one of its architects Angiolo Mazzoni, built post offices and railway stations all over Italy which were always original and often very striking.)
49 'Mussolini riceve gli architetti della nuova stazione di Firenze', *Il Bargello*, 17/6/34, p.3.
Il Bargello concluded that while rational modernism may not have been perfect, Mussolini’s declaration was now:

stimulating and inducing the artists to new roads, making them walk alone without the props of the past in the rarifled air of the Revolution…. Because walking alone in the new air of Italy touched by the high Fascist tension can be signified by a true artist putting into work like the Stadio Berta, pride and honour for Fascist Florence.\

One of the first truly rationalist projects, the station symbolised the nation’s progress under Fascism, not only in terms of its embrace of new technology and capacity to use it, but also through its demonstration of the regime’s attempt to literally unite the nation through improved transport infrastructure.

Despite its national importance, the station’s Tuscan identity was strengthened by the decision to use local stone and marble to supplement the reinforced concrete shell. Similar to the reasons why Bolognese brick had been used to construct the Littorale, this type of local stone was not only justified economically but was also visible in many of the city’s landmark buildings. The terminus’ interior was a mixture of marble from Carrara, red marble from Catelpoggio, Levanto and Amiata, decorated in a style that mimicked the Duomo and many of the city’s other significant ancient buildings. Despite its radical design, the station comfortably blended into the city environment. It was another example of how Fascism presented itself as a mixture of the past and the present through distinctly stylised political architecture in public works projects that were intended to subtly stimulate consent. As Edoardo Detti noted in his study of the city, the station showed how Fascism used buildings to show the strength of the regime by producing domineering monumental works that were intended to compensate for the loss of local communal powers. If Detti’s theory is accepted, then there really could be no better example of a public edifice built in the name of consensus than the Giovanni Berta.

Myths, legends and lo stadio

Since 1922 the stadium in Via Bellini had been the home of Libertas, but the formation of Fiorentina and the consequent burgeoning number of spectators soon prompted the campaign for a new stadium that culminated with the Giovanni Berta. Yet there was more to the demand for a new arena than simply the growing size and status of the club and the

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51 Ibid., p.3.
safety of the increasing number of supporters. As the local sports weekly *Lo Stadio* pointed out, Florentine pride also had to be considered:

Fiorentina’s ground has now been exceeded. The enthusiasm and the passion that animates our crowd make it seem claustrophobic, as it really is. The necessity however...is to equip Florence with a stadium that can admit the masses and be a theatre of sporting displays of exceptional importance.54

The Campo di Marte area, owned by the commune but used by the Ministry for War, had already been identified as the perfect site. Situated on the city periphery, less than one-and-a-half kilometres from the centre and close to the nearby railway station, the zone contained enough space to guarantee the possibility of the complex’s further development. While meeting the CIS regulation, this further encouraged the city expansion that the arena was supposed to launch. As the experience of the Littoriale in Bologna had already shown, if Florence was to grow, its transport systems and roads also required considerable attention. The first significant improvements were seen in 1930, when the dusty roads were covered in bitumen and a tram service extended to specifically cater for those going to the stadium.

The idea for the arena was conceived following the local Fascist Giovanni Berta group’s request for a concession of land to build a sports ground in the nearby Le Cure district, in November 1929. An ex-naval serviceman who saw action in the Adriatic campaign in 1915-18, Giovanni Berta was a fierce anti-socialist and joined the local *fascio di combattimento* in 1920, after which he became involved in the Fascist assault on Bologna where the nationalist Giulio Giordani was martyred. It was a portent of things to come for Berta who was also martyred the following year, when he was allegedly murdered by a group of demonstrators during a socialist strike. Having been attacked, he was apparently thrown from the Ponte Sospeso but clung to a rail, at which point his hand was severed and he fell to his death in the Arno. His body was taken to the family chapel in one of the city’s famous landmarks, the San Miniato al Monte church set on the hill above the Boboli gardens, where the following epitaph was inscribed on his tombstone:

For Giovanni Berta
Soldier of Italy
Here lies the body...
that
the new Red barbarians
drowned in the Arno
throwing him from the bridge
trampling and stamping
on his hands that were hanging on

beating his head
while the innocent screamed:
Mamma.
And the Arno is testimony
to our good and bad people
that shouted their horrifying curse
that you still hear echoing
in the silence
at the place of the infamy.55

Drawing attention to Berta’s fate, Carlo Nannotti, the Fascist fiduciary of the Le Cure
district, drew consolation from the mystical regenerative effects that he believed the martyr’s
death would have upon the city and its citizens: ‘The blood that flowed from the hands of
Giovanni Berta, has not stayed in the water of the Arno, every drop has penetrated the veins
of the new youth, that youth that will live healthily in the air purified by the Fascist
Revolution.56 As ever, the true facts of the event are hard to ascertain, but this is the myth of
martyred Fascism that was deliberately attached to the new stadium through its name. More
than just a memorial, it became a symbol of the sporting rebirth of the city, the region and the
nation under Fascism, as Lo Stadio was proud to proclaim:

We can completely verify in our region the tangible sign of national sporting progress. The “Giovanni
Berta” stadium, the most modern and beautiful in Europe, has worthily completed the artistic face of
Florence, whereas Pisa, Signa, Piombino, Montevarchi, Pontedera and soon Livorno, Pistoia, Siena,
have and will have complete and rich grounds, perfectly equipped for every type of sporting activity.57

Despite the local group’s modest plan, the sports facility became more grandiose
following the intervention of Ridolfi, the Podestà and Giuseppe Corbari, the secretary-
general of CONI. With Fiorentina competing in Serie A for the first time, the Via Bellini
ground could no longer cope with the club’s needs. Consequently, the original stadium plans
were dropped in favour of a larger version that would better serve Fiorentina and the city,
while allowing for the possibility of future international matches being played in Florence.
Above all, as Dr Nannotti stated in a letter to the Podestà, the concession of land at the
Campo di Marte finally resolved ‘in a definite manner, the nagging question that has been
debated for a long time, thus giving to this pre-eminently sporting district, a great
development for the physical education of our youth.58 Reflecting the ulterior motives for
the size of the Littoriale in Bologna, the Giovanni Berta stimulated the construction of a zone

56 Ibid., p.344.
dedicated to the development of sport for the masses that would also undertake an international propaganda role for the regime.

At the time, the architect cum engineer Pier Luigi Nervi had recently completed a covered stand for the Giglio Rosso athletics club, on behalf of the commune, where Ridolfi was also president. How Nervi was awarded the commission to build the first stage of the Giovanni Berta stadium is disputed, some saying he was appointed while others have argued that he won a tender or competition.\(^{59}\) If any competition or tendering process did take place, it seems that a lack of publicity left Nervi as the only entrant,\(^{60}\) although such was his fame and standing within Florence that, based upon his previously completed projects, there was no serious reason for any opposition to his appointment. However he was commissioned, the most important factor in the design process was the patron of the scheme that happened to be the commune. As with work for private patrons, Nervi, who was an influential member of the Florence Higher School of Architecture, had to respect the funder's demands when designing the project. These included a number of technical specifications that were laid down by the commune in an attempt to combat many of the old issues and problems surrounding stadium design.\(^{61}\)

For the majority of Florentines, however, while the aesthetic architectural merits of the city may have been important, the most ferociously debated subject regarding the stadium was just why it had taken so long to build one capable of hosting Serie A matches and how it could now be constructed in the shortest time possible. The wait was justified as soon as its architectural merits were visible, which, according to Michelucci, said much about the city and the regime: 'Florence, with this stadium of pure modern character, has produced a work that superbly represents the reawakening of Italian energies and the concern that the regime has rightly also given to the physical education of youth.'\(^{62}\)

The Mayor and the commune authorised the construction of the stadium's covered stand on 17 July 1930, allocating L. 700,000 for the job.\(^{63}\) Ironically, having taken so long to get this far, time was now in short supply. Nervi was expected to commence work no more

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\(^{58}\) ASCF, BA 116, 'Lettera dal P.N.F. Gruppo Rionale Fascista "Giovanni Berta" al Podestà', 30/5/30.

\(^{59}\) Galluzzo etc., La Grande Vicenda, pp. 36 & 66; Petacco, Il superfascista, p. 38.


\(^{61}\) ASCF, BA 116, 'NORME e condizioni alle quali dovrà ottemperarsi nello studio del progetto e nella costruzione delle Tribune in cemento armato per il Campo sportivo "Giovanni Berta"', undated.


\(^{63}\) ASCF, BA 13623, 'Deliberazione del Podestà', 17/7/30.
than ten days after signing the contract, under the threat of a L.500 fine for every day the project went beyond the 180 working-days it had been agreed it would take.\textsuperscript{64}

While Nervi’s company took in the region of 60 per cent of the fees, he was compelled to recruit the workforce of over 1,000 employees direct from the \textit{Ufficio Provinciale di Collocamento} - Provincial Recruitment Office - with a number of other smaller Tuscan firms accounting for the remaining 40 per cent. For such a huge and prestigious project, it is quite remarkable that Nervi was only allowed to recruit a limited number of colleagues from outside of the city with whom he had previously worked.\textsuperscript{65} This was an example of how the commune attempted to use low cost public works programmes to stave off the cumulative effects of the devalued Lira, plus the world economic crisis and its consequent mass unemployment. In accordance with the mayor’s wishes, the project was also tailored towards reducing the financial burden upon the commune by constructing the stadium principally out of reinforced concrete.\textsuperscript{66} More than just meeting the mayor’s fiscal demands, it was a modern building fabric with which Nervi had already made his name.

The Florentine commune seemed to employ a similar accounting system to that of Bologna, thereby presenting the same difficulties when trying to determine the exact construction costs; two estimates in the same publication putting each seat within the region of L.55 to L.150.\textsuperscript{67} The entire costs of the project are generally considered to have been the responsibility of the commune that covered them with two significant loans. The first was from the \textit{Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni} - National Insurance Institute - in 1928 for the sum of L.70,000,000.\textsuperscript{68} To be repaid over 20 years, the loan was to cover a number of extraordinary, necessary and urgent works in the city.\textsuperscript{69} The second came from the \textit{Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze} - Savings Bank of Florence - for L.2,300,000, to construct the two end terraces and complete unfinished works to the inside of the stadium. In addition to the commune’s unquestionable commitment to funding the project, Galluzzo argues that Ridolfi also made a considerable personal contribution of around L.2,000,000 to complete the second stage of the building process and acquire all of the necessary lighting and sound equipment.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{64} ASCF, BA 13623, ‘Contratto (Brutta copia) fra II Comune di Firenze e la Società in Nome Collettivo Ing. Nervi e Nebbioso Sedente in Firenze’, 1/12/30.  
\textsuperscript{65} Galluzzo etc, \textit{La Grande Vicenda}, p.66.  
\textsuperscript{66} ASCF, BA 13623, ‘Deliberazione del Podestà’, 17/7/30.  
\textsuperscript{67} Galluzzo etc, \textit{La Grande Vicenda}, p.38.  
\textsuperscript{68} ASCF, BA 13623, ‘Deliberazione del Podestà’, 17/7/30.  
\textsuperscript{69} Galluzzo etc, \textit{La Grande Vicenda}, pp.66-67.  
\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Ibid.}, p.26.
Only initially awarded the contract to design the covered stand, Nervi went on to complete all four sides of the stadium in two principal phases from October 1930-November 1931 and from July-December 1932. The finished product had a capacity of 35,000 spectators, 6,000 of which were covered by the daring roof that had been constructed out of a specific type of concrete and steel that was also only available from Italian producers. Most strikingly, in accordance with the mayor’s demand for unobstructed views from the stand, the roof was almost cantilevered to eliminate, as much as possible, the central pillars or supports.

The mayor’s considerable demands warranted the full application of Nervi’s talents to reach a solution that was structurally, economically and aesthetically satisfactory, while covering over 20-metres of seating without the obstruction of intermediate pillars. Independent of the terracing, the roof rested on supports which, according to Simon Inglis’ more recent study of the stadium, were ‘inclined so far back and so high up in the stand that unless one is looking side on, the slender concrete canopy appears to be miraculously cantilevered.’ So daring and radical was the plan to remove the supporting trusses that had previously impaired the view in all other stadia, many doubted his structure would survive the necessary engineering tests, let alone those of time. As the architect Giovanni Koenig later described, before it could be opened to the public:

“One of the greatest living experts on reinforced concrete, a German by birth and Italian by adoption, who was called by the City Council to inspect the work on site, was openly sceptical about the stability of the cantilever roof. His opinion became widely known, so it was taken for sure the roof would collapse. The day the supporting scaffolding was to be removed, poor Nervi found the work site deserted. With the help of a few assistants who believed in him, he set about hammering out the wedges that had been placed between the reinforcing supports.”

Built in a mere 120 days, Nervi’s roof was so innovative, impressive and functional that it was admired and replicated throughout Europe and South America. According to Koenig, who made a number of detailed studies of the stadium, Nervi had ‘created a collective space in which a huge public was contemporaneously the actor and spectator. For centuries in Italy, no similar popular spectacle had been seen.’ His

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71 ASCF, BA 116, ‘NORME e condizioni…’
74 Inglis, Football Grounds of Europe, p.38.
76 Quoted in Galluzzo etc., La Grande Vicenda, p.42.
assessment reflected exactly what Fascist stadium policy had been trying to achieve; not only were the rising stadia propaganda objects, they were also integral parts in the creation and development of a mass popular, collective spectacle. Those who sat in the new stand looked down upon an unusual 500-metre athletics track. Its 220-metre straight forced the terracing beyond either end of the cantilevered roof, at a cost of the stadium’s symmetry. Only half elliptical, it was now D-shaped, giving cause for many locals to suggest it had been deliberately built so, in honour of the Duce.

The city council commissioned the engineer Alessandro Giuntoli to design a rich figurative decoration, for the stadium’s principal entrance. Completed with modernist columns that connected the rational modernity of the regime with its more grandiose Imperial past, Silvio San Pietro has declared it a complete misunderstanding of the modernist nature of Nervi’s stadium.\footnote{San Pietro, 1990 \textit{Stadi in Italia}, p.156.} While there can be no disputing that the façade of the main entrance was generally less acclaimed than the rest of the stadium, in its own way it could also be interpreted as a perfect example of how the Fascist city came to accept and accommodate the possible coexistence of monumental tradition with rational modernism. Whether this was deliberate or not is difficult to say, but the end result was the same.

The next stage of the project was the uncovered stand, Marathon Tower and entry stairways, all on the opposite side of the ground, the plans for which were approved by the mayor in July 1931.\footnote{ASCF, BA 102, ‘Deliberazione del Podestà N. 1687’, 9/7/31.} The augmentation of the stadium was stimulated by Ridolfi’s successful acquisition of top quality players that were propelling Fiorentina towards Serie A, thereby increasing the club’s need for extra capacity to host football at the highest level. Although exposed to the elements, the new stand was equally dashing and innovative in its own way, the drama provided by the 55-metre modernist Marathon Tower and its accompanying revolutionary helicoid entrance stairway.

There were three such stairways in total and their design was inspired by the commune’s demand for ‘the easy flow of the spectators, taking into account their anticipated number.’\footnote{San Pietro, 1990 \textit{Stadi in Italia}, p.156.} This groundbreaking design was only facilitated by the use of reinforced concrete and enabled Nervi to overcome traditional problems of overcrowding at the ground level entry points by immediately shepherding supporters to the highest seats, from where they could disperse. As De Finetti appreciated at the time:
The flow of the public comes in a manner that I believe is absolutely original, like I have never discovered in any other stadium neither ancient or modern: the crowd goes up by means of external stairs to the apex of the stand and from here distributes itself in the best manner, from the immediate view that one has of the seats available.

More than just a practical stroke of genius, the stairway positioned at the centre of the stand was also revolutionary in its aesthetic grace and style, conceived as it was, in Bardi’s opinion, “out of abstract inventiveness and perfected through calculation”. [see Appendix, Figs 16&17]

Structurally the tower was less complex, but it was certainly no less impressive. A complete aesthetic contrast to the Marathon Tower in Bologna, the Florentine version was no less monumental and domineering, while also being adorned by the fasces in order to serve a similar propaganda function. Taller, thinner, much sleeker, it was and remains the supermodel of its era. Fitted with a lift that ascended to a radio transmitter and small box for the public announcer at the top, its base possessed an arengario (balcony) from which mass rallies could be harangued. [see Appendix, Figs. 18 & 19] The tower also had a curved glass along its rectangular front. Illuminated at night, like that in Turin’s Stadio Mussolini, it marked the city’s extended periphery in a clear point of reference for citizens throughout Florence.

Marathon towers punctured the skyline of Fascist Italy in general and, in this sense, the version that adorned the Giovanni Berta was not extraordinary. Where it differed though was in the sleekness of its design and the construction material used, the likes of which had not been seen before. Like Nervi’s roof, this modernist interpretation of the ancient Marathon Tower was almost immediately replicated elsewhere, most notably in Turin but also in smaller venues such as Lucca.

Once the stadium was put into use, it quickly became apparent that its two open ends exposed the pitch to the full force of the wind. For this practical reason, in addition to conforming to the demands of the CONI regolamento on stadia, the Giovanni Berta was completely enclosed by terracing at either end that was also designed and constructed by Nervi. Besides protecting the playing area from the frequent wind that disrupted play, the two curve (curves) augmented the stadium to a capacity that was capable of hosting international fixtures and competitions in Florence. This had been Ridolfi’s ultimate dream and something

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79 ASCF, BA 116, ‘NORME e condizioni…’
80 De Finetti, Stadi. Esempi, p.67.
that the commune up until this point, with some regret, had been unable to demand, as seen in the following communication with the Podestà:

Furthermore the actual number of seats in the stands already built are insufficient, both because international matches are only assigned to those cities that have stadia with capacities for at least 30,000 and because independent of that, this season, in four or five championship matches, there have been 8-9,000 more fans than the 12,000 the stands can actually hold. 82

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Nervi’s design was his deliberate exposure of the stadium’s structural elements. [see Appendix, Figs. 20, 21 & 22] Firmly embracing modernism he chose to make the stadium’s reinforced concrete structure its main feature, as opposed to disguising it. It was a complete contrast to Bologna where the brickwork façade was specifically designed to do the opposite. Simplicity and efficiency were Nervi’s aims and this was the most striking difference between the Littoriale in Bologna, built only five years earlier yet seemingly from a different era. Despite their glaring differences, both served equally important international propaganda roles for the regime while also satisfying the needs of the local team and population. Whereas the Littoriale had been an application of Roman stadium design to the modern era with modern materials, Nervi quite simply broke the mould. This was observed in an article discussing sports architecture, in La Città Nuova, that found: ‘sincerity and architectural originality…in the Berta stadium of Florence, a truly fundamental work for our sporting architecture.’83

When finally completed in 1932, the stadium was fully equipped to undertake its propaganda duties that were local, national and international. As Koenig later noted: ‘Everybody understood that after many years of darkness, Florence finally had a collective work worthy of the times and of its architectural tradition…. thus it found for itself, almost gift-wrapped and certainly unexpectedly, one of the rare masterpieces of modern architecture.’84 As one of the first major buildings of the Fascist era to use modern construction techniques to break decisively with the traditions of the past, it still provides one of the most compelling examples of Fascist architecture for the Fascist era. According to Simon Inglis: Nervi ‘had the audacity to demonstrate that modern stadiums did not have to resemble Roman temples, pseudo-classical palaces, nor even disguise their function behind curtains of brick or stone’. 85
Prior to the Giovanni Berta’s completion in 1932, with the curve awaiting construction, the stadium was inaugurated with a match against the European stars Admira of Vienna, on the 13 September 1931. Immediately before the kick-off an aircraft flew over the stadium from which the pilot and war hero Vasco Magrini launched the match ball, before performing some aerobatics. Not only was this display connected to the Campo di Marte’s former use as a local airfield, it once again juxtaposed the stadium with another form of modernity that was embraced by the regime, while visually displaying its technical progress. In front of a crowd of 12,000 supporters Fiorentina won the match 1-0 with a goal from the phenomenal Uruguayan import Pedro ‘Artillero’ Petrone. Most importantly, Il Bargello was delighted to report how, thanks to the work of the Podestà Della Gherardesca, Ridolfi and Pavolini, the new stadium had finally brought the national standing of Florence up to the levels of Bologna, Milan and Turin.

Famous throughout the peninsula, the Giovanni Berta appeared in a number of specialist magazines at home and abroad. One such Italian publication was Casabella whose editor, the renowned polemicist Pier Maria Bardi, was proud to laud its fame throughout the world: ‘In Moscow, I felt the need to speak of it as a masterpiece.’ He also acquired a degree of notoriety for the stadium by describing it as the first example of Fascist architecture. Indisputably, it was a shining demonstration of a style of modernity that had superseded the Littoriale and taken stadium design to a new level.

Given its radical appearance and growing reputation, there is little surprise that the Giovanni Berta earned the regime considerable domestic and diplomatic capital. The source of great admiration throughout Europe, many requests were made for information regarding its design, such as the Hungarian Athletics Association’s desire to replicate it in an 80,000-capacity version of its own. It was not the only request received from abroad with Sweden, France, Austria and the Soviet Union showing similar interest, while a model of the stadium was also put on display in the Italian pavilion at the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. As Francesca Agostinelli has argued more recently, the Giovanni Berta did not only signal the official entry of sporting buildings into national architecture, it also broke the dichotomy

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86 Battiloro, Lo stadio “Giovanni Berta”, p.159; Galluzzo, Il Fiorentino, p.162.
89 Palla, Firenze nel regime fascista, p.332.
90 ASCF, BA 117, Lettera dal Federazione Atletica Ungherese al Podestà, 27/12/33.
91 See various letters in ASCF, BA 119.
between construction and architecture that had been created in the sphere of culture.\textsuperscript{92} It was only after the Berta’s arrival that sports buildings began to seriously interest the architectural press, as seen in the huge amount of publicity for the 1933 Stadio Mussolini in Turin.\textsuperscript{93}

Although the Giovanni Berta’s design was very much admired throughout Europe, the stadium really came to prominence through the many local and international competitions that it hosted, the first international event being an important football match against Czechoslovakia in the Coppa Internazionale Europea - International European Cup - in 1933. The choice of Florence was not insignificant either, for barring five matches in Rome, one in Padua and another in Naples, the national team had never played outside of the northern power bases of Turin, Milan, Genoa and Bologna. It was naturally a day of great pride for the city and its stadium. Covering the event on its front page, \textit{Il Calcio Illustrato} informed its readers of the ‘magnificent construction that honours Fascist Italy, perhaps more for its architectural style than its technical perfection [that] is finally hosting an international match’.\textsuperscript{94} While the lack of an adequate stadium accounted for the azzurri never having played in Florence before, the choice of the city showed how the regime and the FIGC were attempting to foster an interest in the national representative team throughout Italy’s major calcio cities. On a wet day, the ground was full to capacity. Ridolfi was surrounded by local and national dignitaries in the tribune of honour and the Italian team was packed with the best players in the country, although it was local boy Mario Pizziolo who commanded the Florentines attention.

With the azzurri’s victory the stadium passed its first test, laying the foundations of a ‘lucky’ reputation that would serve the Italian team in the near future. The following November it staged another Coppa Internazionale match against Switzerland, in which Italy again ran out worthy winners. The game was very much used as preparation for the following year’s World Cup tournament, when the stadium formed one of the focal points of the regime’s propaganda campaign. As De Finetti pointed out, the stadium was ‘the most beautiful for its structural audacity and elegance, the work of one of the clearest creators and calculators of reinforced concrete that might be among us.’\textsuperscript{95} With two matches scheduled for Florence, the Italian Consulate in Vigo requested photographs of the stadium and other related sporting works in the city, plus details of what facilities would be available to the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item For a comprehensive list of articles on the stadiums see \textit{Ibid.}, pp.63-64, note 13.
\item ‘Gli otto stadi del Campionato del mondo’, \textit{Lo Sport Fascista}, p.32.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Spanish players, press and public, who would be coming to support their team: it was ‘a good opportunity to show the results, benefits and progress of our Fascist Regime not only for sport, but for all aspects of Italian life’. 

The second of the two scheduled matches, a quarterfinal between Italy and Spain, was recorded as one of the most violent games in the tournament’s history and required settling with a replay the following day, which attracted an even bigger crowd. More than just a simple victory, Italy’s defeat of the strongly fancied Spanish team was interpreted as the ultimate indication of the arrival of the *italiano nuovo*, the new Italian who never conceded defeat and thus always succeeded in winning. The match was arguably the most perfect synthesis of the stadium, the crowd and the sportsman, united in serving the propaganda needs of the regime.

**Fiorentina: Fascist football in a Fascist city**

Despite hosting these high profile fixtures, the arena was not the sole preserve of elite sport. In the true spirit of the ‘era of stadiums’ it was very much a part of the Florentine community, open to local sports clubs, schools, Balilla and Dopolavoro groups that, like the city’s politics, had also been reorganised and rationalised by Ridolfi. From 1929 onwards he restructured Florentine sport by focusing and concentrating on existing resources as opposed to making any dramatic changes. In accordance with CONI’s new norms, a single, large society remained at the centre of each sport around which a number of smaller local groups operated. The activities of these *Gruppi Rionali Fascisti* - local groups - were nonetheless important, as they were expected to concentrate their efforts on training students and those competitors aspiring to greater things, before transferring them onto the principal society of the region or city. One example of this type of structure in action was the Giglio Rosso athletics club that was linked to a number of satellite groups within the city, all of which were members of the Italian Athletics Federation.

Despite being encouraged to develop, smaller societies were unable to progress beyond their given place in the local sporting hierarchy, as participants in any national competitions in which the city was represented could now only be selected from the large central club and not the *gruppi rionali*. While further ensuring that only the elite athletes and competitors that had benefited from the best facilities available could compete in the city’s

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name, it also reaffirmed the Fascist principle of hierarchy that ran through all aspects of society. Besides the Giglio Rosso athletics club, the Club Sportivo Firenze for cyclists, the Palestra Ginnastica Fiorentina Libertas for boxers and gymnasts, and a rowing club, the most notable aspect of Ridolfi’s reorganisation of Florentine sport was the formation of AC Fiorentina. Yet his drive to improve local sporting prestige was also reflected in the number of grant applications he had made to the commune, by 1930, for assistance to establish and improve smaller sports grounds for these new gruppi rionali. Ranging from acquiring land, to resurfacing running tracks and constructing small covered terraces, the combined costs of these requests exceeded L.2,600,000.\(^9\)

It would also be wrong to suggest that Ridolfi’s vision for the development of sport was just limited to the city. He was equally concerned about the entire province where there was a chronic shortage of facilities, which both he and Pavolini communicated in a letter on behalf of the sports branch of the local party: ‘The necessity for a sports ground in every centre, even small, becomes greater and more unavoidable each day. It is absolutely necessary that each commune has its own sports field, where it can train and prepare our youth.’\(^9\) While reflecting the Fascist drive for an improvement in the physical fitness of the nation, Ridolfi’s motivation was very much local, first and foremost, which would thereafter contribute to the all-encompassing health of the nation. Again, it was curing and caring for the composite cell that would contribute to the good of the organic whole. With only 22 sports grounds in the province and four under construction, he was joined by Il Bargello’s Giovanni Buratti in imploring the best local minds to tackle the various obstacles, of which the biggest was arguably financial.

Florence needs a new stadium, local sports grounds and swimming pools, the province has other vital needs. There are zones in which sport is still at the very beginning. In Valdarno, from Compiobbi to edge of the province of Arezzo there is not a sports field worthy of the name, the Mugello high and low, with the exception of Borgo San Lorenz, is in the same condition. Here the work of the Fasci and the communes needs to be more fervent.\(^10\)

Of course, the construction of stadia throughout the region was far from simple, as even the most demanding supporters recognised. Cost was one of the most prohibitive factors, so when submitting their request for mayoral support to begin developing a major

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\(^9\) ASCF, BA 13623, Lettera dal Vice Podestà del Comune di Firenze al Podestà del Comune di Firenze, 4/3/30.
\(^10\) ‘Lo sport e il Regime’, *Il Bargello*, 27/10/29, p.4.
stadium in Florence, Ridolfi and Pavolini proposed a number of ways in which the commune might recoup or justify some of the expense. Besides organising festivals and lotteries to raise money, in addition to directly approaching various central government bodies for direct funding, they also suggested contacting the prefecture to stress the stadium’s contribution to the alleviation of local unemployment. Although both appreciated the difficulty in financing such a project, their letter to the Podestà explained how they did not consider this a justification for inaction: ‘The problem of sports grounds is a problem of means, but first and foremost it is a problem of faith. The communes of the province have been assigned the task of realising a work that has an inestimable social value that moral and physical sacrifices can no longer delay.’

While undoubtedly committed to the development of grass roots sport, Ridolfi’s experience and vision turned Fiorentina into a force capable of competing in the higher echelons of Italian football, which was a huge boost for the city as a whole. It was the type of dynamic radical progress that Fascist Florence believed it was capable of in all fields of life. Besides warranting a stadium that was both worthy and capable of hosting Serie A football, the new ‘superclub’ commanded a united fan base that provided a huge number of vocal supporters for the team at home matches, plus not insignificant financial backing from gate receipts. Neither did their responsibilities end there. Echoing similar appeals for money towards the construction costs of the stadium in Bologna, Fiorentina fans were also asked to help ease the club’s economic burdens. Partly due to onerous taxation demands in the club’s early years, they also derived from a match against Genoa that resulted in Fiorentina losing four championship points and two gate receipts, which, according to Lo Stadio, had left a deficit of over L.50,000.

In return for a donation of no less than L.50, each supporter was given free entry to the popular seats for the remainder of the championship, in addition to having their names published in Lo Stadio. By the following week, perhaps due to a lack of success, the minimum donation guaranteeing entry for the remainder of the season’s fixtures was reduced to L.10. In an effort to secure the best response, the appeal was directed at the ‘social mass’ of supporters rather than Florentine citizens, whom Lo Stadio attempted to draw into a

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102 Ibid., p.2.
104 Ibid., p.2.
105 ‘La Sottoscrizione Bianco-rossa’, Lo Stadio, 19/1/29, p.2
definite sense of community where individual contributions of all values were deemed more important than the actual amount given:

More than anything we insist not on the size of the amount but on the number of subscribers, because all present members need to respond to the appeal... it is not obligatory to give L.100, ten Lire are enough to express a tangible sign of attachment to the colours and this truly derisive figure cannot weigh heavily against the family of the red and whites.106

Lo Stadio's attempt to construct a sense of community around Fiorentina indicated the club's growing importance for the city's continued representation at the national level, although it would be unrealistic to suggest that all supporters stood by the team through good times and bad. The reality was that many were only interested in success and when this was hard to come by in the 1929-30 season, Lo Stadio issued a rallying cry condemning those who failed to adequately support the team:

[Fiorentina] needs members who, even in hard times, do not lose themselves in trifling matters, but know how to close around the players, to give them that strength of will that sometimes compensates for technical deficiencies. And these fans know that Fiorentina still has more to say in the championship; they know that all is not lost, because if it does fall it needs to fall on its feet.107

Despite this plea Fiorentina was relegated from Serie A in 1929. Nonetheless, the unification of Florentine forces and the experience of competing in the highest division for the first time, had undoubtedly strengthened the sense of local identity and stimulated the desire for a quick return to the top flight among the club's supporters and its directors. After all, only in Serie A could supporters enjoy the Apennine derby with the famous Bologna FC. As Lo Stadio had previously pointed out, this was the greatest opportunity for the city, the club and the fans to distinguish their superior qualities from the rest:

Do we truly want to show that we know how to be Florentines in the nicest sense of the word? To show that this, our sweet city, is truly the master of good taste and manners?...Do you remember the first day of the season? Yes, it is true. We were beaten, well beaten, indeed, but our conduct especially...was simply marvellous and I remember well having applauded and seen many of you too...applauding the talented Ambrosiana that knew how to win with elegance and good taste.108

Lo Stadio's contributor showed how the local identity was not being defined and strengthened through victories alone, but also through the achievements, reputation and general comportment of the football club. So important had Fiorentina become to the city's identity that Il Bargello reminded the local press of its responsibility to restrain such dangerous sentiments. 'Campanilismo is a wound from past times, of which vestiges still

107 'Nervi a Posto Signori', Lo Stadio, 2/2/29, p.2.

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unfortunately exist, which spring to light particularly through minor sporting competitions; it is one of the ills towards which journalism needs to complete its demolition work. Gibur continued to say how Mussolini had stipulated that the sports press now needed to support the regime’s work to combat this malady. Merely pointing out the mistakes and the bad examples of campanilismo was no longer enough. It now needed to provide the remedy:

Above all sports journalism needs to be far from all profiteering and needs to give sport every help as an impartial apostolate, where occasionally bitterness cannot be overcome by the pride of success. Today sports journalism is living working force in the domain of Fascism and needs to be necessarily at the top of its mission.

Yet it was impossible for the city’s newspapers and reporters not to be passionate about Fiorentina, especially in the light of the club’s achievements from such modest beginnings when compared to the long established big city Goliaths of the game. The stadium’s inaugural fixture, in 1932, also marked Fiorentina’s return to the heights of the national league and the beginning of a momentous season in which it incredibly finished in fourth position, level on points with Milan. It was a huge boost to the city’s sporting reputation that was recognised in the commune’s monthly publication, Rassegna del Comune, as ‘the brilliant and enviable affirmation of sporting Florence in the Italian football championship’.111

While Ridolfi took many of the plaudits for having knocked some of the bigger teams off their pedestals, this success was primarily due to Pedro Pedrone’s 37 goals in 44 matches. Ridolfi could not refrain from congratulating himself on the wisdom of his L.30,000 investment, which had been a calculated gamble to raise the overall ability of the team to a standard that was worthy of the stadium and capable of competing in the national league. Beyond simply basking in the fourth-place finish, the Rassegna showed how calcio and Fiorentina had become an extension of the city’s identity politics:

In fact, it is always necessary to remember that there are squads boasting glorious and ancient traditions, which have always represented the aristocracy of Italian football, that comprise of players of the highest class and reputation that are still no better [than Fiorentina] - like Roma - and below like Torino, Genoa, Milan, Lazio etc...it is opportune to note how the Marchese Luigi Ridolfi...dedicates all of his passion and competence, making sacrifices that are not recognised or appreciated enough.112

In 1934-35 Fiorentina went one better, finishing third in Serie A after leading the division for much of the season. However, as viola fans were to find out, the club’s successes

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110 Ibid., p.9.
111 Note di Sport. Calcio, Firenze: Rassegna del Comune, June 1933, p.188.
112 Ibid., p.188.
always seem to proceed a fall. By 1938 it was back in Serie B for twenty years. Yet even from such a lowly position Fiorentina continued to impart a modernising influence on the Italian game through coach Giuseppe Galluzzi’s adaptation of a metodo style of play, which was as much about players’ attitudes as it was tactics. The change again showed the city’s readiness to embrace, experiment and introduce new ideas in all aspects of life. While it did not bear immediate rewards in the championship, in the 1940 Coppa Italia, Fiorentina surprised the big names of Milan, Juventus, Lazio and Genoa on the way to claiming its first national success.

However, such achievements coupled with the new national league, strengthened the team’s support within the city that intensified the considerable side effect of campanilismo. Not surprisingly, it was most evident during the Apennine derby with Bologna, when the embers of the ancient city rivalries were fanned by the game. Despite its celebration of Fiorentina’s famous victory over the renowned Bologna team in 1932, Lo Stadio continued to rail against the developing trend of such strong local rivalries. In an editorial headlined ‘Finiamola’ (Let’s end it), the ‘football fan’ was described as little more than ‘an outlet for old campanilistic grievances that Fascism has never tolerated and has energetically crushed wherever it has manifested itself’.¹¹³

While directly vilifying sentiments of campanilismo, it was still a veiled attack upon the Bologna supporters who were said to have abused many Fiorentina fans, identifiable by their club colours, that were returning along the main road from the Littoriale after their team’s unexpected win. According to Lo Stadio: ‘Whoever was tempted to react ran the risk of being quickly packed off to the hospital and whoever was instead disposed to have justice...was forced to take all the compliments that the primitive and ignorant could have invented.’¹¹⁴ Lo Stadio naturally highlighted the excellent behaviour of the travelling Florentines who, it said, contributed much to the team’s victory through their vocal support from the first minute until the last. Moreover, the sporting nature of their support merited special praise, ‘despite provocation from the Bolognese fans (if one can call them that).’¹¹⁵ While the impartiality of Lo Stadio’s account is open to question, it does show how serious the extent of the problem was considered to have been. Ironically, the newspaper’s campaign against such excesses and its defence of the Fiorentina fans, only exacerbated the problem, thereby risking a further escalation the next time the two clubs met.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.1.
Besides these particular victories, it was the consistency of Fiorentina’s play that boded well for the future, the Rassegna assuring fans that: ‘the athletes of our squad will be capable and prepared, spiritually, physically and technically, for new affirmations and new conquests in the name of sporting Florence.’\textsuperscript{116} The emergence of Fiorentina as a squad of national repute completed the city’s football holy trinity that consisted of the fans, the stadium and the team, each of which could be equally proud of the other. As the Rassegna emphasised: ‘The Florentine public is among the most enthusiastic and affectionate of all Italy towards the colours of its squad the Viola. The Stadio Comunale “Giovanni Berta” is certainly the most beautiful in Italy, even if not the most complete or the biggest. That is still its value!’\textsuperscript{117}

Yet, despite the reservations about extreme campanilismo, healthy competition and rivalry was still encouraged. One example was the 1934 Tuscan derby between Fiorentina and Livorno that La Nazione portrayed as a triumph for sport in the region: ‘The fans of both clubs will come observant, like so many soldiers of sport, and they will bring with them their healthy weapons of enthusiasm and chivalry to fight a fair battle of spirits in the name of sport.’\textsuperscript{118} Lo Stadio was equally realistic to accept that passionate fans were a vital part of sporting competition, but it must be recognised that these two local publications only referred to the good competitive ethics of Tuscan supporters. By further highlighting the apparent cultural and ethical differences between its readers and those in the rest of Italy, in the classic way of the Fascist regime, this also intensified the Tuscan identity by defining the bad characteristics of those outsiders from beyond the region.

Fans from outside of Tuscany were rarely paid compliments, as in the earlier case of Fiorentina-Bologna where the levels of acceptability had apparently been transgressed so badly, by the Bolognesi, that the incident was declared a sign of sporting and civil decadence.\textsuperscript{119} Having identified this evil, Lo Stadio questioned whether some of the most drastic measures imaginable might be necessary to quell the excesses: ‘On the other hand if a football match needs to mobilise such public force, as much as used to be necessary to check an attempt against the powers of the State, it has to be asked if it is right to allow the public the opportunity to participate in certain sporting events.’\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., p.188.
\textsuperscript{117} ‘L’Associazione Fiorentina del Calcio’, Firenze: Rassegna del Comune, June 1934, p.188.
\textsuperscript{118} ‘Il derby’, La Nazione, 18/2/34, p.6.
\textsuperscript{119} ‘Finiamola!’, Lo Stadio, p.1.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., p.1.
Realistically this was probably impossible given the huge public interest in the game and the inevitable strength of reaction that would have resulted from any form of prohibition. No doubt aware that any serious suggestion to outlaw football by Lo Stadio, would also have been tantamount to the paper cutting its own throat, Florentines were urged to take the pacifist route in response to aggression, which only further reinforced their parochialism:

As interpreters of the feeling of our sporting public we do not want Florentines to forget the offence in the Bolognese city, when "Fiorentina" hosts "Bologna" and its supporters. But we also demand for the prestige of Italian sport, for that spirit of fraternity and brotherhood that needs to tie all of the sporting masses of Italy, for the good name of our people...the hour has truly arrived to end certain habits that, in the 11th year of the Fascist Revolution, cannot and need not be tolerated.121

Another interesting aspect of this report was its reference to the number of female Fiorentina fans that had travelled to Bologna, despite the regime’s reservations about female involvement. As Victoria de Grazia has noted: ‘So-called male games, in particular soccer, were discouraged; with trepidation, Arpinati acquiesced to the formation of a single “woman’s soccer group” at Milan, on the condition that it never played in public.’122

Although women were undoubtedly in the minority at the Bologna-Fiorentina match, their presence indicated the growing importance of calcio among both genders and thus the way in which local teams could be seen to increasingly represent a large percentage of the population within their cities. Such was the importance of women that Lo Stadio returned to the theme only a few weeks later; encouraging more to attend matches: ‘In the feminine field there is also the phenomenon of women and girls who are fans...yet they have not been to a match... Nevertheless, I know they would like the pure air and the sport.... Should they find themselves at the Berta stadium they would not regret it.’123 Perhaps it was hoped that women might curb the less desirable aspects of male behaviour at football matches but, despite their presence, campanilismo continued to preoccupy the press and not just in Florence.

After supplying six or seven players to compete for the national team in an unimportant friendly, Juventus wrote to the FIGC to question whether such a commitment, on its part, had really been necessary. In response, one Roman daily that was apparently renowned for its criticisms of anything outside of the capital, lambasted not only Juventus but also the national team manager Vittorio Pozzo. In response, Lo Stadio drew attention to the unidentified weekly paper’s own outbreaks of partiality:

121 Ibid., p.1.

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If "Roma" loses a match on the field do not worry (it is pointless reading certain Roman papers) that it will be the fault of the referee....we should say that the Roman sports weekly does not completely benefit the interests of its squad, or of the team of its heart, with indecent behaviour.... And this will happen while it does not cease to give the impression, to the rest of Italy (and there is much of it outside of the capital) that Rome wants to win the scudetto by hook or by crook. 

As ever, this quotation needs to be read in context, Lo Stadio having already demonstrated its own extreme parochialism. However, this alone is significant as it once again illustrated the strong, local, city-based identities that were being developed and expressed via football teams throughout the country. Moreover, it had also broached a relatively new problem that was emerging from the national and international expansion of the game; that of players' responsibilities towards representing their club and country. While the club versus country debate never reached the heights of the modern game, where money and expanded competitions at both levels have blurred their points of difference, international football was becoming an increasingly important preoccupation of players and fans alike.

At the local level, despite failing to create a side anywhere near as strong as Bologna's, Fascist Florence had put itself on the calcio map by using Fiorentina as the hub around which the local, city based identity could be expressed and its population united. Created from the merger of formerly antagonistic clubs, Fiorentina brought Florentines together under the one giglio rosso, where their mass strength was directed towards supporting the team on the national stage. In itself, this was not necessarily an unusual feature, Roma having also been created by the local Fascist Italo Foschi in 1926, following the merger of three smaller teams.

However, the strength and identity of Fiorentina was imposed most strongly through the avant-garde construction of the Giovanni Berta stadium. Not only did it dramatically contrast with the aesthetics and style of the Littoriale in Bologna, its revolutionary design and construction symbolised the radical rebirth of Florentine architecture in this period, which reflected the historically dynamic, radical and independent local party and its leadership. Despite its unquestionable importance for the regime's image and prestige, the stadium was Florentine first and foremost, a point that Francesco Varrasi illustrated by comparing it to Wembley Stadium in London:

When we think of Wembley we think of its symbolic national value, we see the FA Cup Final, the English national team matches and we do not see a strong connection to the local identity of the city of


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London. Whereas from the moment of its construction the "G.Berta" became a symbol of Florence and of Fiorentina.  

While the style of the Giovanni Berta stimulated many arguments regarding the nature of Fascist architecture, art and design, it was in no way so radical that it threatened to exceed the regime's bounds of acceptability. In fact, especially when compared to Bologna, it illustrated the many paths to Fascism that were open to the localities, thereby enabling independent minded cities, such as Florence, to maintain and develop their proud, independent, historical traditions without threatening the regime's notion of the organic national society.

124 'Siamo seri', Lo Studio, 26/2/33 p.1.
125 Varrasi, Economia, Politica e Sport in Italia, p.242.
Shooting for Italy: Foreign Bodies on Foreign Fields.

The norms that govern the game impose the principle of authority, without which order cannot exist.¹

The inaugural World Football Championship in 1930, which later became the World Cup, considerably raised the stakes in international football competition. In a fit of pique, having been refused the honour of hosting the tournament, the Fascist regime declined to send its team to Uruguay. Yet, even before the host nation had lifted the trophy in victory, Mussolini was planning a similar celebration in Rome in four years time. The 1934 World Football Championship was Mussolini’s Berlin Olympics: an opportunity to show the world the achievements of Fascism while further uniting the nation behind the regime’s creations of the previous 12 years in the process.

The Giovanni Berta stadium in Florence, the Littoriale in Bologna, plus six others throughout the peninsula,² showcased to the world not only Fascist Italy’s heritage but also its will to embrace technological advance. The regime’s creative bent was not restricted merely to bricks, mortar and reinforced concrete either; it also extended to the bodies, minds and souls of the nation that had been tempered in the crucible of the revolution, for Fascism had also built a new man who knew how to play football.

The Italian national team’s World Cup victory in 1934 confirmed the emergence of a generation that was to dominate international football for the rest of the decade. Before retaining the World Cup trophy in France in 1938, a team of university students affirmed Italian football supremacy by winning the 1936 Olympic football tournament in Berlin, which was the greatest amateur international accolade. Italian clubs were also making a serious impact in Europe. Most notable were Bologna FC’s victories in the Coppa d’Europa in 1932 and 1934, before claiming the Paris Exhibition tournament trophy in 1937 that apparently shook the world.³

The regime was naturally enthusiastic about the emergence of such talented teams, citing the successes as evidence of its investment in the physical education of the first Fascist generation. Moreover, it was also suggested that the victories were achieved using an

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² Other cities included Genoa, Turin, Milan, Trieste, Florence, Bologna, Rome and Naples.

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intrinsically Italian style. While such claims often represent typical racial stereotypes, on this occasion the Italian press positively employed them.

With Fascist foreign policy proving disastrous or embarrassing at best, there was a huge source of pride to be exploited in calcio’s European domination. As Adrian Lyttelton suggests: ‘the movement and Mussolini’s regime constantly proclaimed national greatness, measured in terms of international prestige.’ However, so deliberately did Fascism associate itself with the successes of the era that both club and international teams competing abroad were increasingly viewed as direct representatives of the regime, and were thus exposed to the increasing anti-Fascist ire. Tournaments, such as the Coppa d’Europa, began to show the negative and positive aspects of international club competition, while politically motivated incidents showed how calcio had become more than just a game. The regime was well aware of the situation, fiercely condemning such attacks on its club sides and the national team, but fully appreciating the domestic and diplomatic capital to be gained from all international victories.

Having already established how the regime restructured calcio into a formidable system that reflected, represented and responded to the domestic needs of the new order, it remains to be seen how and with what effect the game was pushed into diplomatic service in the name of Fascism.

**Sporting Ambassadors**

When the azzurri claimed the World Cup in 1934, there were already many indications that Italian sport was growing in strength and quality. From the mid-1920s the regime had already begun to appreciate and demand international sporting achievements and their spin-offs, although at this premature stage visible progress was as important as victory itself. The huge growth of competitive athletics in schools, universities and youth groups reflected sport’s growing diffusion throughout the mass of young Italians, which corresponded with a noticeable improvement in competitive and technical standards. However, as Luigi Ferrario warned La Gazzetta’s readers, there was a need for patience if Italian youth was to mature into a significant force at the international level: ‘Athleticism has

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5 ‘Cinquecentomila’, *Lo Sport Fascista*, 1, 1930, pp.2-5.
made great progress among the young. The Amsterdam Olympics will certainly not confirm it, but the reserves are being created and the future will show that a good wine is coming.\textsuperscript{16}

Despite such necessary realism, the 1928 and 1932 Olympic Games still provided opportunities to quantitatively and qualitatively assess the improvement of Italian sport under Fascism, and the results were better than expected. Symbolically, the athletes departed for Amsterdam from the Littoriale, behind a rally of 50 or more cars from the automobile clubs of Milan and Bologna bound for the capital of the Netherlands. Organised by Bologna’s Fascist daily \textit{Il Resto del Carlino}, it intended to publicise the paper domestically while also giving ‘other people a visible demonstration of the national solidarity that reigns in Italy today...of how much youth and fervour has brought this country to life’.\textsuperscript{7}

With international sport increasingly important, the departing athletes were reminded of their need to assert themselves, for ‘victories are valued as clear signs of racial superiority that are destined to reflect in many fields outside of sport’.\textsuperscript{8} The growing significance of international sport for Fascist Italy was evident earlier in 1928 when the national football team drew with their renowned Spanish counterparts in Gijon. According to Arpinati’s \textit{Il Littoriale}, such achievements were not only forcing foreigners to respect Italians, but members of the nation were also rediscovering ‘the glow of \textit{Italianità} to which their hearts were thought to have been closed forever’.\textsuperscript{9}

Following the team’s 4-3 victory over Hungary in 1928, Mussolini praised Arpinati directly ‘for the perfect organisation that had taken Italian football to victory; and, in a sign of his satisfaction with the young athletes, he gave an autographed photo to each member of the squad’.\textsuperscript{10} It was an early indication of how the Duce would personally associate himself with the team’s every success.

The \textit{azzurri}’s first major achievement was a semifinal appearance in the 1928 Olympic Games when it narrowly lost to Uruguay. According to \textit{La Gazzetta}, it was a performance and result that confounded the harshest critics as ‘nobody believed... the Italian team had the means, passion and enthusiasm to throw a serious obstacle at the feet of the

\textsuperscript{8}\textit{Ibid.}, p.5.
\textsuperscript{10}ACS, SPD, CO 1922-43, B.345, Nos.119850/2 & 10698, 26/3/28.
irresistible Uruguayan squad.\textsuperscript{11} It was a distinguished performance that boded well for the future, especially given the Italian ancestry of many of the excellent Uruguayan players.

Eighteen medals at Amsterdam was no reason for Italian sport to become overconfident. However, \textit{La Gazzetta} believed that the successes said much about the developing Fascist society, which, with France, England and Belgium reportedly in decline, was incontrovertibly ‘marching at the vanguard of modern sport’.\textsuperscript{12} Yet Mussolini demanded more, assigning Lando Ferretti the task of making CONI an organ of the party to ensure that the organisation and preparations for the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics were even more thorough. In the intervening years athletes became state concerns, competing not just as ambassadors of Italy but also of \textit{Italianità}.\textsuperscript{13} Sport assumed a more visible political aspect; Mussolini’s black-shirted ‘boys’, who sang the ‘Giovinezza’ at the opening ceremony, were a far cry from the allegedly dishevelled team that had arrived in Antwerp for the 1920 Games singing the ‘Red Flag’.\textsuperscript{14}

Twelve gold, 12 silver and as many bronze medals gave the team overall second place in Los Angeles. After an audience with Mussolini, his ‘boys’ went to Milan where Arpinati awarded them with the ‘medal of steel’, ‘the highest official recognition’ possible according to \textit{La Gazzetta}.\textsuperscript{15} While the lesser-value of steel, when compared to gold, was probably significant, the medal was a sign of how the regime would continually attempt to devalue the importance of established international prizes with its own tin-pot trophies.

Yet if Olympic success demonstrated the progress of Italian sport in general, the Coppa d’Europa/Mitropa Cup was the litmus test for Italy’s premier football teams in Europe. Although no rival to the World Cup, it proved to be a fiercely contested event, often reflecting both the diplomatic strains of the decade and the degree to which the regime had politicised football, with all Italian teams deemed to be its direct representatives. In 1932, both Juventus (Turin) and Bologna FC reached the Coppa d’Europa semifinals. Whereas Bologna reached the final relatively untroubled, Juventus’ tempestuous meeting with Slavia Prague was the clearest demonstration yet of the way that \textit{calcio} had become the regime’s representative abroad and a diplomatic barometer.

\textsuperscript{11}‘La sconfitta vale più di una vittoria’, \textit{La Gazzetta}, 8/6/28, p.1.
\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p.1.
\textsuperscript{13}‘L’idea olimpionica e le vittorie degli ambasciatori straordinari a Los Angeles’, \textit{La Gazzetta}, 5/10/32, p.1.
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p.2.
For Club and Country

With the English Football Association's minimalist participation in European football, Italy was perfectly placed to align itself with the associations of the successor states of central Europe that were intent on making their collective weight felt within FIFA. As Lanfranchi and Taylor have observed, international football was used to symbolise and commemorate international friendships and diplomatic alliances. Yet, besides the sporting aspect, the involvement of Italian teams in regular competition with the central European states was also a convenient way for the regime to involve itself in the region. The creation of the successor states from the former territories of the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires resulted in a power vacuum in central Europe. Fascist Italy had considerable interests in this volatile area of prime political real estate that, despite various attempts to secure the existing European borders, continued to be unsettled by revisionist grievances.

According to Zanetti and Tornabuoni, the central European football associations of Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary had a close relationship that was 'cemented in the fierce dispute for the Coppa Internazionale', which was launched in 1927. However, calcio was putting stress upon the regime's diplomatic relations as early as 1923, when the Communist party of 'Red Vienna' urged its members to oppose the visit of 2,000 Italian fans for an international between the two countries. Animosity between the fans and players of the two nations became a regular feature of the era, which culminated in 1937 when the behaviour of the Austrian fans and team apparently forced the referee to abandon the contest after 29 minutes of the second half. Although the Italian press attributed the abandonment to a waterlogged pitch, Pozzo later recalled the team meeting shouts, whistles and curses as part of a demonstration that 'was clearly political'.

Such events were not unusual. The treatment of South Tyrolean Germans was a source of great ire, which was further heightened by Mussolini’s long-term ambition to stake out the Danube as an Italian sphere of influence in a three-way relationship with Austria and Hungary. Unlike revisionist Hungary, Austria was content with maintaining the status quo in
the hope that it might help preserve its democracy. Such issues were reflected in the strained internationals between the two teams, as the state attempted to defend itself against the ambitions of both Mussolini and the extreme right Austrian Heimwehr. By the late 1920s, a programme had emerged whereby the central European extreme right hoped to combine and challenge the French hegemony that had been established in 1918.

Bilateral agreements between Italy, Austria and Hungary in 1927, were followed by a customs union in 1932 and the 1934 Rome Protocols, which rubber-stamped the Italian ascendance and directly threatened the Little Entente states of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Despite the 1924 treaty of friendship with Czechoslovakia, signed when the regime was preoccupied with domestic affairs, the net effect of Fascist Italy’s Danubian policy was its almost complete isolation and encirclement by revisionist states intent on rectifying the ‘wrongs’ of 1918. This was the background to Juventus’ visit to Prague that year.

Despite winning the first leg by four goals to nil, La Gazzetta’s correspondent attributed Slavia’s victory to more than just superior technique, suggesting the Turin squad had been defeated by a much fiercer opponent than the opposition team:

We intend to speak of the public that, after the usual pitch invasion during the match, abandoned itself to disgraceful violence against our players. This issue of the disgusting incidents on the football field of Prague is becoming a sad Bohemian tradition and its significance is aggravated when one sees that they always have the corollary of wild demonstrations against Italy.21

Violence against Italian teams playing abroad was, apparently, no novelty in this period, but on this occasion the Juventus players matched it blow for blow. Following a collision between Cesarini and an opponent, the Slavia coach was said to have thrown a bottle at the Italian before making a number of gestures towards other members of the Juventus team.22 While the attack was clearly directed at the team, a government source recorded it as having provoked ‘public demonstrations towards our players, but above all against Italy’.


21 ‘La semifinali della Coppa d’Europa’, La Gazzetta, 8/7/32, p.3.


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After more contentious decisions, Juventus’ hopes disappeared in chaos; *La Gazzetta* recalling ‘the ire of the public that invaded the pitch once again and assaulted our courageous players. Cesarini defended himself well, helped by his companions among whom Orsi, Vecchina and Caligaris were severely and repeatedly hit.” The Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ account of the incident was no less impartial:

The public invaded the field and savagely beat the Italian players who defended themselves. Some Italian players were bullied and taken away from the field of play by the arm, where repercussions took place. In the meantime those not taking part in the beatings screamed and shouted abuse at Italy, Fascism and the Duce. Particularly bitter were those under the stand who turned towards the Italian delegation in general causing uproar, insulting and threatening them.  

Interestingly, correspondence between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers refers to the ‘deplorable incidents that took place in the course of the Italy-Czechoslovakia football match’. This indicated the extent to which the identities of Italian city clubs playing abroad were increasingly and officially becoming blurred, as they were perceived as representatives of the regime. The confrontation quickly became an international incident with the FIGC secretary Zanetti communicating with Juventus, the Italian embassy in Prague and Ugo Meisl the competition’s secretary. Despite apologising for the behaviour of the fans, the Czechoslovak representative, Kroft, attacked the Italian press for escalating the incident. In response, Francesco Giunta, the Under Secretary of State, recommended the suspension ‘of future participation in sporting competitions in Czechoslovakia’ until such time ‘as the public will be more civil, and that will take a long time’; although this never seems to have been put into practice.  

Unsurprisingly, the return leg on 10 July further exposed the tensions between the two states, with *La Gazzetta* billing the match as an opportunity for Juventus to show ‘Slavia the true measure of its ability, and the uncivilised crowd of Prague the measure of its spirit of hospitality’. The importance of the tournament as a whole for the regime was evident in the presence of Zanetti at the game in Turin and Arpinati at the semi-final in Bologna. Both games were also opportunities to prove Italy’s superior organisational qualities: ‘With this act our Federation wants to show its great interest in these matches and its desire to show to

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24 *La semifinali della Coppa d’Europa*, *La Gazzetta*, 8/7/32, p.3.
the outside world that Italy knows how to overcome, with preventive arrangements and direct intervention, the stormy incidents.\(^30\)

If Juventus could not win the tie, the directors were intent on gaining a moral victory. *La Gazzetta* pleaded with fans not to respond in kind: ‘Thus no recriminations; a dignified and admonishing silence towards the hosts and a continuous and warm encouragement to the town’s team.’\(^31\) Despite an extra 500 stewards inside and outside of the ground, over 1,000 people were said to have greeted the Slavia team on its arrival at the station: ‘to put on a hostile show’, which, according to the Ministry of the Interior, the police did well to contain.\(^32\)

With Juventus winning 2-0 at half time, a missile from the crowd apparently struck the Slavia goalkeeper, Frantisek Planicka, after which his team refused to play on. The Italian press claimed the incident had been stage managed and thus the reaction was unjustifiable,\(^33\) an opinion that was later supported by the referee who stated that Slavia had no right to leave the field.\(^34\) The tie became more of a matter of pride between two countries and their respective governments than the two football clubs, reflecting the strained diplomatic relations that were not improved by the Slavia players return to Prague. According to Italian Foreign Ministry’s records, crowds at the principal stations saluted ‘the victims of the fascist violence’ and greeted the players who were ‘covered in bandages as if they were returning from a war zone.’\(^35\)

Predictably the Czech and Italian press sprung to their respective team’s defence and an ugly war of words broke out. Drawing attention to the political nature of the events of Prague in particular, *Il Tevere*, the staunchly Fascist Roman daily, launched a stinging attack:

> When one has, let us not say the courage – it is stupid to speak of courage from hundreds of kilometres away - but the nerve to print a litany of such vileness, one loses every right to be treated on equal terms. Thus we will not be refusing or answering the nonsense that has been written and said in Prague. It is only important for us to reveal that a sporting boycott and cowardice are being discussed. For the first, there is no need for Czechoslovakia to exert itself…. On the theme of cowardice, we know with what authority Prague can speak of it.\(^36\)

\(^{30}\) 'Le semifinali della Coppa d’Europa', *La Gazzetta della Domenica*, 10/7/32, p.3.
\(^{32}\) ACS, PS 1932, Sezione II, b.59, f.D.80, Telegramma No.32827(6), 8/7/32.
\(^{34}\) 'Gli strascichi della Coppa d’Europa', *La Gazzetta*, 14/7/32, p.4.
Although stressing his concern for the harm done 'to the cause of sport and the cordiality of international relations', the FIGC secretary, Zanetti, nonetheless continued to try and undermine Slavia's position, in order to ease Juventus' passage into the final. It was far from the ideals of brotherhood, cultural exchange and cooperation upon which the competition had been established. It was settled on 15 August in Klagenfurth, Austria, where the tournament committee, dominated by Austrians and Hungarians, was expected to order a play-off to determine the victor. However, in a punitive measure intended to restore order to the competition, which suited neither club, both were disqualified. The net result was Bologna FC's victory by default.

The patriotic press of both countries were reportedly asked not to exacerbate it further. Perhaps in response to the Czechoslovak government's specific order for its media to employ 'favourable language towards Italy' in the future, La Gazzetta responded positively to an international match of 'reconciliation' scheduled between the two. Deliberately restricting its reports so as to avoid any misunderstandings, the paper was convinced that 'the match between the Italian national squad and that of Czechoslovakia will seal a complete reconciliation between the players and public, between fans and journalists.'

However, fears that the match might worsen the situation only served to emphasise the incendiary nature of the calcio conflict. Consequently, Amadeo Fani, the Under-Secretary for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, argued that: 'it is evidently in our interest not to provide new occasions to rekindle a polemic that in the political field is indisputably useless and dangerous.' The International Cup match went ahead in October 1932, although the diplomatic prize seemed more important to all.

So tense was the atmosphere four days before the match of 'reconciliation' that the FIGC publicly accepted responsibility for its part in the incident to the Czechoslovak media. Contrary to its true belief, the declaration was portrayed as a way of reaffirming: 'the cordiality of relations and sentiments of esteem of the Italian sports fans towards the Czechoslovak nation.' The gesture, which ratified an earlier official confirmation that

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37 'La Juventus è finalista della Coppa d'Europa', La Gazzetta, 12/7/32, p.5.
38 'Le decisioni di Klagenfurth per la Coppa d'Europa', La Gazzetta, 16/8/32, p.5.
39 Ibid., p.5.
40 AdMAde, AP 1931-45 Cecoslovacchia, Busta 3, Rapporti Politici, Telespresso N.4511-AI/2633, 'Italia e Cecoslovacchia', 1/12/32.
41 'Dichiarazioni del delegato Italiano e favorevoli commenti della stampa', La Gazzetta, 26/10/32, p.1.
43 Ibid., p.1.

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relations between the two were now ‘cordial,’\textsuperscript{44} was enough for \textit{La Gazzetta} to claim that ‘every misunderstanding and every preconception’ about the match had been ‘officially resolved’.\textsuperscript{45} Nonetheless, a metal fence was still erected around the pitch and observers from Austria, Hungary and Switzerland were sent to ensure it was played in the correct atmosphere. On the same day an alternative friendly match was also organised to try and distract any Czechoslovak fans that may have still held a grudge against Italy.\textsuperscript{46}

Clearly neither government could afford, nor did they want, the match to degenerate into one where every shot was taken on their behalf. Recognising ‘the political aspect of the event’,\textsuperscript{47} \textit{La Gazzetta} implored the azzurri to counter everything thrown at them ‘with that enthusiasm, correctness and prowess that has made them the greatest representatives of our sport in the entire world: good combatants in all regions and in front of all adversaries’.\textsuperscript{48} Under the circumstances, both governments were undoubtedly content to see the match pass without incident between either the players or crowd, irrespective of Italy’s 2-1 defeat. Football and politics were the winners, but in the ideological decade of the 1930s it was only a sign of what was to come for the special envoys of the Duce, the regime and Fascism as a whole.

Win, lose or draw, so important was international competition for the regime that, when such chances did materialise, the azzurri needed to be able to call upon their strongest players, but this was not always possible. In 1932, Giuseppe Meazza, Italy’s most potent striker and goalscorer, was also committed to his role in the Fifth Alpine Regiment as part of his national service. His potential omission from the team to face Switzerland provoked Alberto Santini, ‘on behalf of all sports fans in Milan’, to write to an unidentified member of government asking him to:

\begin{quote}
..put in a good word to the number one Italian sportsman, our beloved Duce, who knows his and our passion, so that Meazza might be allowed to resume his Sunday football match. Our great champion, who elevated the motherland in memorable victories over the Hungarian, German and Spanish crowds, is now inactive during the next important international meetings.\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

Allesandro Chiavolini, the Segretaria Particolare to the Duce, pursued the matter. Writing to Camillo Grossi, head of the cabinet for the Ministry of War, he expressed the

\textsuperscript{44} AdMAde, AP 1931-45 Cecoslovacchia, Busta 4, Miscellanea-Affari Politici, ‘Incontro di calcio a Praga fra Italia e Cecoslovacchia’, 6102/14-3, Telegram to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 26/9/32.
\textsuperscript{46} ‘La partita Cecoslovacchia-Italia per la Coppa Internazionale’, \textit{La Gazzetta}, 26/10/32, pp.5-6.
\textsuperscript{47} ‘La partita della nebbia’, \textit{La Gazzetta}, 30/12/32, p.1.
\textsuperscript{49} ACS, SPD, CO 1922-43, B.345, n.119850/2, Letter, 13/1/32.

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importance of Meazza and other sportsmen to the national cause that were being prevented from expressing their talents by the Ministry’s regulations. Chiavolini’s own reluctance to inform Mussolini of the situation suggested he knew the Duce might not have been pleased to discover such impediments to his athletes’ work.50

The fans also had a role to play in the development of the regime’s prestige abroad: the 1933 match with England in Rome providing a perfect opportunity to demonstrate the regime’s apparent mass support. Besides the sporting nature of the crowd, La Nazione was keen to report the impression that was made upon the head of the English party, Mr Kingscott: ‘I was profoundly moved by the warm demonstration the crowd gave to the head of government.... today I had the true impression of the fondness the crowd has for the Duce.’51 Mussolini had attended the match with PNF Secretary Starace at his side and their entrance into the tribune of honour was reportedly greeted with mass cheering and the waving of handkerchiefs by more than 60,000 people. Meanwhile, the public address system informed everybody that: ‘With the Duce one is never lost: neither will we lose today.’52

As already seen, football crowds outside of Italy also often responded to the politicised nature of calcio Italiano and, on the cusp of war, the 1938 World Cup tournament in France did not lack controversy. Italian hopes were buoyed by the successes of Italian clubs and the national team since 1934, especially the victory of Bologna’s young team in Paris in 1937. The European press also concurred with La Gazzetta’s confidence that the team would again defend the nation with honour: ‘The Italian sporting flag, which needs to be lowered from the stadium flagpole today, will be the same that will rise again tomorrow, more joyous, in the warmth of new victories.’53

The azzurri’s hopes were not only buoyed by a number of Italian fans that had taken advantage of organised travel packages to Marseilles and Paris,54 they were also raised by some notable absentees. There were no South American teams, the Anschluss had swallowed the Austrian squad, while the Civil War prevented the Spanish from competing. Above all, the continuing lack of any English representation remained a double-edged sword. More than just a chance for revenge after the 1934 ‘battle of Highbury’, Sisto Favre wanted the English to participate for diplomatic reasons, arguing that sport remained: ‘the best instrument of

50 ACS, SPD, CO 1922-43, B.345, n.119850/2, 129843, 20/1/32.
54 ‘Viaggi per la Coppa del Mondo di calcio’, La Gazzetta, 26/5/38, p.2.
cordiality and understanding between countries both near and far. His views almost certainly reflected the regime’s continuing desire to forge positive diplomatic relations through football, even if the opposite was sometimes the case.

The 1938 tournament was always likely to be a tense affair for the regime’s representatives, but Mussolini’s anti-French, or pro-Franco, statements on 14 May 1938, perhaps combined with the recent collapse of the French Popular Front, resulted in anti-fascist protests during the tournament. According to Papa and Panico, the first incident occurred as the team arrived in Marseilles, which contained a considerable number of exiled Italians. Some 50 years later, Ugo Locatelli recalled 3,000 or more French and Italian anti-fascists being controlled by baton-wielding mounted police, his account contrasting with the Italian press’ record of a courteous reception at the station from a number of dignitaries. In fact, the team’s only problem was the apparent over-enthusiasm of local and Italian supporters. Piero Rava, the only surviving member of that team in 2001, was also unable to recall the alleged protest. However, given that such incidents continued throughout the competition, it seems likely that Locatelli’s recollections were closer to the truth. What protests did take place were almost certainly directed more against the team as the representative of the regime than as a football entity. In fact, it was the most recent example of the team reaping what the regime had sowed during the 12 years in which it had increasingly politicised the Italian game.

As far back as 1933 exiled Italians in Brussels took the opportunity during Italy’s friendly match against Belgium to assault Niccolò Carosio’s microphone, to broadcast to the nation back home. Although the protest went unmentioned in a Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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56 ‘Fondamentale discorso del Duce sulle direttive della politica italiana’, Il Popolo d’Italia, 15/5/38, p.1. In this speech, in Genoa, Mussolini publicly stated his desire for Franco to win the Civil War in Spain rather than ‘Barcelona’ that was supported by the French. His announcement of a political accord with England also threatened the potential encirclement of France when he declared it ‘an accord of two Empires that extended from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean’.
57 For other examples of anti-Fascist/Italian protests in France and the deteriorating relations between the respective countries, as recorded by the Italian Foreign Ministry, see AdMAde, AP, 1931-45 Francia, Busta 33/4, ‘Rapporti Politici’.
58 Papa & Panico, Storia Sociale del Calcio, p.197.
60 Interview conducted 30/11/2001, Turin.
61 For more details on this incident and the Carosio’s career in general see ‘La radiocronaca all’italiana: Nicolò Carosio’, Ludus, 1, 3-4 October 1992-April 1993, pp.40-49.
telegram,\textsuperscript{62} it showed the importance of Carosio’s broadcasts for the diffusion and popularisation of the politicised game among those masses.

The azzurri entered the tournament carrying the heavy baggage of success that made them everybody’s favourites to win, if not everybody’s favourites! At the opening match in Marseilles, they met Norway on the field and an estimated 10,000 Italian political exiles in the terraces, Pozzo recalling ‘a background of political-polemic. Unjustly. Because our players did not even dream of making it something political. They represented their country and naturally and worthily wore the colours and insignia’,\textsuperscript{63} which just happened to be the fasces. More than just the team’s colours it was the Roman salute that most angered the hostile crowd, especially when Pozzo ordered the players to perform it twice:

\begin{quote}
At the salute, as predicted, we were greeted by a solemn and deafening barrage of whistles and insults.... We had just put down our hands when the violent demonstration started again. Straight away: “Team be ready. Salute.” And we raised our hands again, to confirm we had no fear.... Having won the battle of intimidation, we played.\textsuperscript{64}
\end{quote}

Not surprisingly, the azzurri made a less than impressive start to the tournament, snatching a 2-1 victory in extra time. It was a result in which even the most nationalist reporters had difficulty finding anything positive, ‘Vittoria ma non basta’ (Victory but not enough) summing up the general press opinion.\textsuperscript{65} General Vaccaro was also unhappy and asked Pozzo to explain why he had played the ageing Eraldo Monzeglio and not Alfredo Foni, one of the discoveries of Berlin. Pozzo’s defence was pressure from Villa Torlonia, Mussolini’s residence in Rome where Monzeglio was often to be found coaching football to the Duce and his sons.\textsuperscript{66} Vaccaro’s intervention brought an end to both Monzeglio’s international career and the type of political interference in team selection that Pozzo claimed had forced him to pick only players that were party members in 1934.\textsuperscript{67}

The aftershocks of the events of Marseilles were felt in Paris when Italy met France in the quarterfinal. However, if the anti-fascist protests undermined the azzurri’s confidence in Marseilles, they inspired them in the capital, particularly after the Fascist leadership intensified the local rage. With both teams’ shirt colours normally blue, lots were drawn to decide which team would change. Italy lost, but rather than wear the traditional change
colour of white the team was ordered to play in all-black. The decision is often cited as having emanated directly from Mussolini who was still smarting from the earlier poor reception, although there appears to be no archival evidence to support this. Nonetheless, given the maglia nera (black shirt) was never worn again, one can safely suggest it was intended to both represent the regime and confront the vocal anti-Fascists.

The Italian team’s actions were provocative and the protests were continued in the semifinal by a crowd that was ‘manifestly hostile to the Italians’, according to La Nazione. In the face of hostility and adversity, Il Popolo d’Italia recorded how: ‘the squad in its entirety...has fought the greatest match in this tournament, it is Italy - the blue shirt with the Sabaudo shield and the Fascio Littorio on the chest - that has won the right to contest the final in Paris.’ It was a lesson for organic Fascist society that was repeated time and time again, the sum of the team’s individual parts combining to form a stronger unit capable of overcoming all obstacles and opposition.

**Mussolini’s Mondiale: the policisation of the 1934 World Cup**

Four years earlier, Fascist Italy had shown its strength when hosting the 1934 World Cup tournament. Although less contentious than France, the competition was Mussolini’s opportunity to put his nation on calcio’s world stage, from which Zanetti and Tornabuoni claimed it had gained international prestige ‘as much for the technical value of its game as its organisational knowledge’.

Despite the huge burden of expectation from the public and the regime, Pozzo’s team preparations were restricted to only three competitive matches that year. In one, in February 1934, his opposite number Hugo Meisl and his Austrian ‘Wunderteam’ gave the Italians a harsh lesson in technique and psychology, imposing a comfortable 4-2 defeat. It was a disastrous result that forced Pozzo to end his loyalty to ageing players and turn to the new generation of athletes that had been educated and honed in the crucible of Fascism.

While the 1934 tournament was the first step on the road to international football domination, it was also seen as an opportunity for the regime to demonstrate its ardour, achievements and creative potential to both Italians and the rest of the world. As identified in one anonymous government note to the CONI president, Achille Starace, the ‘attention of the

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70 ‘L’Italia elimina il Brasile...’ *La Gazzetta*, p.4.
world of sport will turn itself on Italy; huge crowds of foreign sports fans are predicted. More than just a chance to display its athletic elite, this official continued to stress the regime’s opportunity to demonstrate its entire range of skills by organising a tournament that he deemed ‘worthy of an Olympics in every respect, and for the mass attention and passion is perhaps superior to the same competition’.  

The statement contrasted with Ferretti’s opinion back in 1926, when the regime was trying to win the right to host the 1936 Games. Writing to Giacomo Suardo, the Under-Secretary to the President of the Council of Ministers, he stated: ‘There is no need to tell you of what global importance an Olympics can have, the significance of which goes beyond the greatest sporting competition, raising it to a political event of the first order.’ While the exact value of the World Cup in comparison to the Olympic Games may have been a moot point, the above statement indicates how the regime appreciated the political aspect of such international sporting events as early as 1926. Either way, as Augusto Parboni argued in *Lo Sport Fascista*, it said something significant about the regime: ‘An event as colossal as this, in which the squads of four continents will be represented, could only have been organised by Benito Mussolini’s Italy, that has given to the world…the norms of genial and perfect sporting organisation, which it envies and tries to copy in vain.’

Despite speaking through the mouthpiece of one of the regime’s better funded monthly magazines, Parboni was correct in identifying how, even in its preparatory stages, the competition’s organisation and the diffusion of sport throughout Italy was making an impact in foreign circles. One such observer was Mr Fischer, from the influential Hungarian Football Association, who commented on what he saw as the miraculous discipline in society following ten years of Fascist rule. More specifically, he was said to have been particularly impressed by the nation’s sporting progress, as ‘from Torino and Trieste to Taranto and Palermo, Italy shakes with healthy sporting enthusiasm, while ten years ago sport, as it is understood today, had not reached Rome’. However true, his remark illustrated the regime’s fundamental aspirations for sport, namely the establishment of discipline and organisation alongside the nation’s unification.

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73 Ibid
74 ACS, PCM 1928-30, f.3.2.5. n.269, ‘Letter from L. Ferretti President of CONI to G. Suardo Undersecretary to the President of the Council of Ministers’, 10/11/26.
76 A. Parboni, ‘Si prepara la Coppa del Mondo di calcio’, *Lo Sport Fascista*, 1, 1934, p.28.
While FIFA’s organising committee, headed by Giovanni Mauro, hoped to maximise its earning potential and ensure the tournament’s smooth organisation, the FIGC also created a number of its own offices, including one for travel and accommodation. Foreign fans from France, Holland, Switzerland and Germany were enticed by organised travel, subsidised by 70 per cent, while internal transport was also discounted for those wishing to move between the various cities.\(^77\)

With any profits from the tournament to be divided among the world governing body and competing countries, the FIFA General Secretary, Mr Schricker, was naturally keen to encourage a successful tournament, which may have stimulated some of his public praise on the improvements of life under the regime. During a visit to Rome he was apparently ‘amazed by the enormous progress...the perfection reached by the new Italy in all fields and, in particular, in the tourist and hotel industries. This will tempt the foreigners to undertake the journey’.\(^78\) Following the Duce’s demand that all foreign visitors experience a show of the utmost efficiency, the propaganda machine went into overdrive, so much so that FIFA President Jules Rimet is said to have felt that during the tournament Mussolini had in fact been the true President.\(^79\)

Such attention to the international market also had considerable domestic value; positive foreign reactions to Fascist Italy’s tournament organisation were featured regularly in the press. *La Gazzetta* gave Schricker’s visit considerable column inches and, having declared the tournament ‘a prize that Italy merited’, he reportedly thanked the nation for the excellent way it had been organised ‘without giving a thought for the benefits or costs involved.’\(^80\) He was somewhat wide of the mark: Fascist Italy cared considerably about the potential costs and profits.

To complement its exemplary athletes, monumental modern stadia and a self-proclaimed ability to put on a good show, the regime’s publicity campaign knew no bounds as the tournament was commodified to a new level. Match tickets were printed on good quality paper with an elegant design in the hope they would become popular souvenirs that travelling fans would take back home. \[^{[see Appendix I, Fig. 23]}\] A competition to design a promotional poster was won by the Futurist Marinetti, with his image of a goal with a black ball and the fasces. One hundred thousand billposters were placed throughout the country and

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\(^{77}\) La *organizzazione del grande avvenimento in un’intervista con il generale Vaccaro*, *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 26/5/34, p.8.

\(^{78}\) ‘È un premio che l’Italia si merita’...’, *La Gazzetta*, 1/4/34, p.3.

cigarette packets, naturally consumed in huge quantities by the masses, also carried the image of a ball in the net. Commemorative postage stamps were also issued featuring the *fasces* plus all of the stadiums with an aeroplane flying above. [see Appendix I, Fig. 24] It was similar to the image and message that was conveyed during the opening of the Giovanni Berta stadium, which linked the two forms of Fascist modernity.

As interesting as the stamps themselves was the dispute that erupted between the regime and FIFA over their production. Besides showing the regime’s growing confidence to challenge the hegemony of the game’s traditional powers and its awareness of the potential merchandising opportunities, the dispute demonstrated the Italian government’s desire to control every aspect of the tournament’s organisation as well as maximise profits and propaganda potential. As one government document records, the stamps’ global exposure was expected to make them ‘a great work of world propaganda for *Italianità*, connecting in everlasting signs the characteristics of sport with the Fascio Littorio, reconfirming to all the world that Italian Sport had been strengthened by Fascism’.^81

However, rather than allow the stamps to be printed and distributed through the Italian postal service, FIFA wanted to issue them through Switzerland where the Association was based. Host countries of the Olympic Games and the previous World Cup had traditionally been awarded this right; it was not something the regime was prepared to relinquish. As detailed in a letter from the Secretary of the Organising Committee, Doctor Barassi, to the Under-Secretary of State to the President of the Council of Ministers, Edmondo Rossoni: ‘it would undoubtedly take prestige away from Italian sport and the nation and would unjustifiably link Italy’s onerous and honorary world event to another country.‘^82

The Ministry for Communications was also aware that such stamps had ‘always been most sought after abroad by collectors because of their rarity’, and in this case they were said to have been in even greater demand due to Italy’s ‘avant-garde position in the game of football’.^83 Given the expected future increase in value, plus anticipated sales within the region of one million,^84 it was hoped their issue from Italy would guarantee the regime an

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^80 ‘È un premio che l’Italia si merita’…’, *La Gazzetta*, p.3.
income of at least L.100,000, which would 'serve to alleviate the huge costs that the Italian Federation has incurred'.

Despite the important domestic and diplomatic capital to be gained from the stamps and the tournament as a whole, the regime could not afford to ignore the financial burden of the competition that was estimated as costing within the region of three-and-a-half million Lire. Naturally costs needed to be covered and income from the stamps would have been supplemented with that from tourism and gate receipts. Money itself also had a propagandistic angle; for the first time FIFA’s tournament payments were made in Lira, the currency of the host nation. The decision not to use sterling or dollars was portrayed in La Nazione as an ‘official recognition that Italian currency offers a greater confidence and guarantee than that of other foreign currencies’. Irrespective of the legitimacy of the above statement, it was an opportunity to suggest that ‘Fascism’s healthy political economics has made itself felt beyond the border and in whatever area. The attention of the world is on Italy as guided by the Duce who educates, teaches and collects followers in every part of his active life.’

To ensure participating teams were sufficiently motivated, FIFA’s organising committee, with heavy Italian representation, requested that CONI supply a prize on behalf of Mussolini. Its response was the Coppa del Duce, which consisted of a group of footballers fixed in an action scene in front of the fasces. [see Appendix I, Fig. 25] Carved in bronze by the sculptor Grazes, who was responsible for the winged statue of ‘Victory’ on the roof of the Marathon Tower in Bologna, the trophy cost in the region L.1,500 and was said to have been as prestigious as the Jules Rimet trophy. According to one official press release: ‘Besides the “World Cup” offered by FIFA, the football world championship is blessed by some of the richest prizes, among which, unique in moral value, is that offered by the Duce, who wanted to recognise the exceptional importance of the event in such a way.’

Besides the tournament itself, Rome was also given the honour of hosting FIFA’s International Congress, only eight years after it had last taken place in the capital. Held in the civic centre of the Campodoglio, it was another feather of respectability in the regime’s cap

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88 Ibid., p.6.
90 ACS, PCM 1934, f.14. 4. n.465, n.1379, 31/8/34.
and, according to Il Resto del Carlino, more than just ‘the opportunity to demonstrate the efficient organisational ability of Fascist sport in general and that of calcio in particular’. As General Vaccaro later reported, the Congress had indeed ‘been able to make those ties of esteem and reciprocation among nations, the moral value of which is worthy of recognition by each of us’. 

With stadia already groaning under the various representations of Fascism, the direct politicisation of the tournament began with the draw for the first round matches. According to Il Resto del Carlino, these ‘assumed a special solemn character due to the presence of S.E. Starace, the Secretary of the Party and head of CONI.’ It took place in a room of the ‘Albergo degli Ambasciatori’ (the Ambassadors Hotel) flanked by a squad of armed Blackshirts and with the Coppa del Duce as the focal point. Two young Balilla members dressed in naval uniforms, one of which was General Vaccaro’s son, drew the cards from each urn. Although the draw did not favour Italy, Vaccaro said this only confirmed the tournament’s honest organisation: ‘if we win, the legitimacy of our victory will be brighter and more persuasive.’

Despite expecting victory, if it failed to arrive, the tournament’s diplomatic benefits still made its organisation worthwhile for the regime. One example was the Brazilian Federation’s allegedly deliberate appointment of a journalist and writer as head of the squad. Renowned more for his Fascist sympathies than his football knowledge, the Brazilians apparently made it known that he had been appointed with the firm intention of strengthening the existing ties between the two governments. Furthermore, as each team arrived to prepare for the tournament, messages of gratitude and admiration were sent to the Duce from the various national federations. Among the many examples published in La Nazione, was that of the Egyptian Football Commission, which, ‘on reaching the Italian soil, sent its respectful honour to the Duce of Fascism’. According to Starace at the FIFA congress in Rome, such plaudits ‘showed that the organisation of a world championship of such importance is only possible where the dynamism of a country’s life might have at its centre the vivid awareness and will of a leader’.

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Others paid alternative homage to Mussolini; the Argentine squad visiting his birth village of Predappio and the tomb of the Duce’s family, where a wreath of Italian and Argentine national colours was laid. Prior to the quarterfinal match in Bologna between Hungary and Austria, both teams met the local organising committee and Fascist hierarchy during which Podestà Manaresi referred to the way in which sport and calcio was reuniting former enemy nations. Whereas ‘in war they fought each other in opposite camps, so in peace they find themselves united by a sincere friendship. And sport precisely needs to cooperate to help because it intensifies and strengthens such sentiments among diverse nations.’ Not only was it hoped that such demonstrations of friendship would further develop good diplomatic relations between Italy and the various competing nations, they were also used to convince Italian citizens of the regime’s growing international respect and recognition. Above all, the competition was also a good opportunity to impart a number of lessons throughout society that were intended to contribute to the establishment of consensus.

Mussolini chose to attend most of the Italian matches and while his presence was always as a high-profile supporter, his actions - if deconstructed - suggest that an alternative significance was often apparent. One example was the azzurri’s opening match against the USA, which he attended with two of his sons in an effort to stress the importance of supporting the team. He also made a deliberate point of paying his entry fee in order to put a definitive end to the ‘immoral’ system of complementary tickets. As stated in La Nazione, those ‘Portoghesi’ who sought such tickets were an example of ‘a bad moral attitude that they believe can be justified with their social position, sporting connections and other means that are condemned in the Fascist regime. The Duce wanted to set an example: an example of healthy Fascist morality.’

If certain members of Fascist society could enter for free, this would have undermined the regime’s meritocratic promotion of calcio, which was intended to reflect both its supposed ideals and, more realistically, its attempt to placate or subtly mobilise the working classes. However small, there was also the obvious impact upon the tournament’s

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100 The expression ‘Portoghesi’ referred to anybody who gained access to the theatre or any other public spectacle without paying the necessary entry fee. It originated from the C.18th when the Portuguese Embassy in Rome announced a performance at the Teatro Argentina for which tickets had not been issued. It was enough for individuals to present themselves as ‘Portoghesi’ to gain entry. See Lessico Universale Italiano di Lingua Lettere Arti Scienze e Tecnica, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1977, pp.443-44.
income generation, which was increased by the regime’s concern about attendance figures for the early matches in particular. In fact, Italians turned out in force, *Lo Sport Fascista* revelling in the surprising response to the organisers’ appeal for public support. The resulting gate receipts of L.1,200,000 were declared a sign of ‘a disciplined and intelligent public that had learnt to watch sport for itself with interest and passion.” So passionate were the Italian fans that the Duce was forced to ask: ‘how can Italy not be the champions?’

A passionate and united support for the *azzurri* was yet another metaphor for society, indicating the way Fascism was apparently uniting the nation behind it, even in those localities and cities, such as Florence, that had developed problematic local identities.

Following the *azzurri*’s quarterfinal in the Giovanni Berta stadium against Spain, one of the strongest teams in world football at the time, *La Nazione* deemed the Florentines’ impressive display of undivided support for the national team as crucial to its ultimate success: ‘The crowd was crazy, it was a screaming monster of thousands and thousands of mouths. And still it was beautiful. In it you find an overwhelming sense of life, a febrile passion capable of knocking over any obstacle, almost capable of opposing the force of nature.’ Like Le Bon’s earlier prediction, it suggested how an astute political leadership could direct the passion of the atavistic amorphous mass of the crowd.

The huge mass of *calcio* followers was also prompted each day by the increasingly nationalist sports press that continued to make the most of the *azzurri*’s achievements. Following Italy’s semifinal victory over Austria, Bruno Roghi declared in *La Gazzetta*: ‘the *Wunderteam* is no more.’ Typical of the immodest and occasionally subtle patriotism that made Roghi’s name, it also indicated the growing sense of national pride, confidence and superiority that the team’s success was engendering among the nation, the ultimate swagger being reserved for the final in Rome.

The match, against Czechoslovakia, was contested in the PNF stadium in front of 50,000 people, which included many Czechoslovak fans who had taken advantage of the ‘special’ subsidised trains. According to Luigi Freddi in *Il Popolo d’Italia*, on the Duce’s arrival, having ‘forgot they were here for a sporting contest’, the fans offered him ‘the staggering sight of their uncontainable passion. The tender acclamation exploded in the

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immense bowl with a supernatural persistence. The display continued as the teams entered the stadium, handkerchiefs were waved to cries of ‘Duce, Duce’, as the Militia band played a selection of Fascist hymns.

More like a Fascist rally than a sporting contest, it was the type of support that Mussolini had earlier recognised made it almost impossible for Italy to lose; a goal in extra time from Angelo Schiavio secured the title. In the centre of the pitch the Italian players paid homage to the Fascist hierarchy in the stand, before respecting both national anthems and the ‘Giovinezza’ once more. For their efforts, not only were the players rewarded with the World Cup trophy and the ‘prestigious’ Coppa del Duce, they also received a signed photograph of Mussolini and the medaglia d’oro (gold medal). The latter was one of the highest honours available and was given in recognition of their conquest of the football world in the name of Mussolini and Fascism. It was an apparent paradigm of national destiny.

*It’s not just the competing, it’s the winning that counts*

It was the first of three consecutive international tournament victories that enabled the regime to claim, with some justification, to be the world’s dominant football nation. Besides the Fascist hierarchy, there were also a number of manufacturers keen to link their products with both the team’s achievement and the game’s natural association with health, which had been stimulated and promoted by the regime.

One such product was ‘RIM’, an intestinal cleansing agent that claimed to keep women young, sluggishness and obesity at bay, make children healthy and strong, in addition to its general benefits for all sportsmen. As if to ratify the claim, the advert carried a letter from the azzurri squad masseurs, Angeli and Bortolotti, who had apparently requested an adequate amount of ‘RIM’ for the team’s tournament preparations. It was perfect product placement and, thereafter, no marketing campaign for any Italian product, even beer and chocolate, was complete without a footballer’s image or endorsement.

Besides defining the azzurri as arguably the strongest team in world football, the general success of the tournament projected Fascist Italy as a welcoming country capable of organising large and potentially costly events. Allegedly positive reports from across Europe were reprinted in the Italian press, not only to sell the regime’s achievements to the

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108 For various foreign press comments see ‘La stampa estera concorde nel riconoscere il valore degli azzurri’, La Nazione, 12/6/34, p.1.
domestic market but also to stake a claim for another big event in the future, namely the Olympic Games that Mussolini coveted with a passion. As Bruno Roghi pointed out in *La Gazzetta*:

> the spontaneous and most heartfelt statements of our foreign colleagues are more than sufficient to show that Mussolini's Italy - that was once little Italy of all improvisations and apologies - has organised the festival of football with the style, flexibility, precision, even the courtesy and the meticulousness that indicate an absolute maturity and preparedness.... For this the Italian Football Federation is worthy of Fascist sport not only by virtue of the primacy reached on the fields of the eight superb stadia, but because it knew how to guarantee the perfect functioning of the massive organisational task.  

The Italian press naturally exploited the victory's full potential, setting it in the imagery and language of national struggle and of football patriotism. It was an expression of the national will based upon the merits of collective organisation and discipline, which, in Vaccaro's opinion, derived from Mussolini's inspiration. Bruno Roghi extended the argument in his article, headlined 'Soldati dello Sport' (soldiers of sport), and attributed the victory to the nation itself:

> They are rare, the rarest of matches in which you see the metamorphosis of the players, no longer little coloured boys who go about their work, with the ball at their feet, but little, gallant soldiers that fight for an idea that is greater than them but who work for the divine unknown, that is the genius of the soldier on the charge. They are the matches, in other words, where not one squad of 11 men but a race shows itself with its feelings and instincts, its anger and its ecstasy, its character and attitude. The game that the Italians won at the stadium was this type of match.

Complying with the Fascist vision, Vaccaro used the team’s success as another allegory for organic society; ‘Team Italy’s’ victory indicating what could be achieved if the team, the reserves and the crowd worked together. It was a theory that the Florentine Fascist weekly *Il Bargello* supported with even greater gusto, noting how the national success was an example of how to meet and overcome future challenges. Apparently, it was:

> the affirmation of an entire people, the indication of its virile and moral strength and not an essentially sporting fact. We Fascists cannot understand how this indispensable contribution of the national spirit can be separated from the result that needs to be attained. Working in every field of human activity, you struggle in the name of the motherland, it is the motherland that triumphs over everything, it is the entire nation that participates towards the objective, spurs on and encourages the protagonists that become anonymous but aware instruments of this will.

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113 'Gli azzurri nel nome del Duce…', *Il Bargello*, 17/6/34, p.7.

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Calcio had become a victim of its own success and Italian teams were now expected to dominate. As Vaccaro explained, by virtue of the pride the national team had bestowed upon the nation and the regime, the ‘azzurri, wherever they go, will need to defend and confirm the primacy won’. Fortunately, the regime’s restructuring of the game had created a generation of players that were capable of responding to the almost impossible demand.

This was demonstrated by the victory of the Italian Universities team in the 1936 Olympic football tournament in Berlin. The success was particularly sweet as the students were the fruition of the regime’s investment in compulsory physical education, which was uncovering previously undetected sporting talents. Ten years after the formation of the Ballila movement and the restructuring of CONI, the entire Italian Olympic squad was hugely improved. The success of the football team, however, was largely unexpected, primarily due to the participation of other professional squads.

The decision to completely adhere to the amateur ethos of the Games - and thus exclude the stars of 1934 - was an opportunity for Fascism to claim the moral high ground. Basking in the warm glow of success, Leone Boccali reaffirmed in Lo Sport Fascista, how: ‘occupied by the evident moral reasons and...protocols not to participate with its best national team, but rather with a formation in order with the Olympic laws, as usual, Italy chose an original solution, sending the national student team.’ Prior to the tournament, FIGC President Vaccaro had been less bullish, hoping above all to avoid any unforeseen shocks that might have tarnished Italy’s World Champion status. Nonetheless, he was confident that amateur calcio had strength in depth beyond what any other nation could offer. His belief was based upon the Italian Universities XI’s successes in the World Student Games in 1927, 1928, 1930 and 1933, the ultimate victory against Germany being apparently comparable to the World Cup win one year later.

It was this product of a Fascist education that many, including Emilio Colombo in La Gazzetta, now saw sweeping all before them on the football field. It was this ‘Latin Blood’ that had enabled the azzurri to defeat an obdurate Norwegian team earlier in the tournament: ‘In the crucial moments of the rough struggle, the Norwegian players did not find the ardour, the flame of passion, the fighting spirit, the overpowering thrusting characteristics of the

114 Il valore della vittoria “Azzurra”, La Nazione, 14/6/34, p.6.
His remark, although not so different from what was generally being written, did refer to blood, thereby making the link between victory, success and racial fitness, which, thus far, had been underplayed. Boccali attributed similar importance to the victory because it had 'been stubbornly wanted and beautifully won, not by the use of exceptional players, of which some are 'repatriates', rather by 14 boys that have been selected exponents of national breeding'.

Boccali went beyond attributing the success to just the regime's youth policy by differentiating between these pure Italian athletes and those repatriates or oriundi (first-generation Italians from Latin America) that had featured in the 1934 World Cup. Such a bold distinction was again unusual; for example, nobody had previously complained despite the presence of five oriundi in the victorious 1934 squad. Likewise in 1936, the masses were more likely to have agreed with La Nazione's correspondent Giuseppe Ambrosini, who referred to the athletes as: 'our best, dearest, flourishing youth, that knew how to hold the tricolour high abroad, in the name of Italy and the Duce.' That said, both Colombo and Boccali's comments were indicative of a directional shift in the regime's attitude to race, which became even more apparent after the 1938 success in France.

Whatever contradictions the oriundi or rimpatriati might have unearthed, the regime was still intent on exploiting every potential scrap of propaganda, ably supported in its work by the Italian press. In the year in which Gino Bartali also won the Tour de France cycling race, the azzurri's triumph further underlined the sporting progress of the nation and its apparent inspiration. As with the two previous championship wins, this success was linked to the regime and the Duce at every opportunity, Vaccaro being pleased to inform Mussolini that 'the flag of the revolution has triumphed in your name'. As Il Bargello observed: 'triumph is the synthesis of Italian and Fascist technical and moral superiority, reached with the tenacious will and absolute discipline of the athletes in the style of the time of Mussolini.'

As ever, the Italian press was keen to publicise foreign appreciation, especially those Parisians that were reportedly won over by the azzurri's performance. As Lo Sport Fascista
described, smiles and applause of genuine recognition replaced the angry fists of the supporters in Marseilles. The often quoted French journalist Maurice Pefferkorn, reportedly writing in Auto, was also said to have drawn attention to the standards that Italian football was setting throughout the world. The azzurri ‘appeared as a model of play, a dazzling example of style, and an Italian school is already talked of, to which one needs to aspire. This is perhaps the greatest recognition, the most significant eulogy: the azzurri have become the masters.'

In Rome, a mass celebration was held in the Stadio Olimpico where a crowd of 50,000 people, plus the Duce, sang a rousing collection of Fascist anthems, which included the ‘Empire Hymn’, the ‘Giovinezza’, the ‘Hymn of Work’ and the ‘Hymn of Ethiopia’. Past athletes who had died serving the motherland were commemorated while the future was represented by a display of young sportsmen and Dopolavoro members. Beyond just celebrating the azzurri’s achievement, the display was intended to show that the Italian sporting renaissance did not just include professionals or privileged classes, but extended to the masses.

In a more private ceremony in the Palazzo Venezia in Rome, on 29 June 1938, the entire team plus coach Vittorio Pozzo were received by the Duce and the President of CONI, Achille Starace, where they were awarded the medal of athletic valour. It was ‘a cold and hasty affair’, as Piero Rava recalled, the event little more than a 15-minute photoshoot for Mussolini after which the players were rewarded with their L.8,000 win bonuses. When asked what the event had meant to him, the feelings of team captain Giuseppe Meazza were allegedly much warmer:

> It made a magnificent impression! Above all because it gave me the opportunity of being received by the Duce for a second time...I hope to be present also in 1942 to be able to contribute to the third azzurri victory that would make us definite owners of the trophy. This is the burning desire for me and my companions and for this reason we will prepare ourselves with Fascist will, driven by today’s extensive eulogy from the Duce.'

Besides signifying progress, this success abroad was used to demonstrate that the Italian victory four years earlier had been neither a fluke nor attributable to home advantage.

There was also the distinct flavour of foreign military conquest, Il Popolo d’Italia referring

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126 ‘Bisogna imparare dagli italiani...’, La Nazione, 21/6/38, p.5.
128 Interview conducted 30/11/2001, Turin.
to ‘the victory...on foreign ground even hostile territory.’ It was a theme that Bruno Roghi naturally exploited in his patriotic acclamation of the success in *La Gazzetta*:

> It takes faith. You don’t win an international match, played thousands of kilometres from the motherland, just with the bravura of well-honed bodies and with the fire of well-tempered courage. It takes a high ideal pulsating in the spirit...

> A match like this is not just a sporting episode. It is, above all, patriotic fact. To win it is necessary to know in every moment that even the ball can be a means to show to the foreigners that you are worthy of belonging to the earth that has given us life and honour.

Roghi’s references to faith, well-honed bodies and high ideals summed up the *Italiano nuovo*, a concept that Lando Ferretti further developed in *Lo Sport Fascista*. Far from merely representing a sporting victory, he argued that the triumph in Paris was evidence of Fascism’s successful breeding programme, which was now driving the nation forward in all fields of life:

> But if this renewed triumph of Fascist sport in the most popular and widespread game of times (it could be said that football is a physiognomic expression of mass life at the moment like cinema) represents only a consolidation of positions already reached, the victory...has brought us other targets, it has revealed the world to us in the new light of our agricultural and industrial organisation. Because creating a race, the production of exceptional animals, raising and managing them to the ultimate victories in the international arena is not only a sign of the sporting maturity of a people, but rather of the ability to create and win in every sector of productive activity.

As Roghi also stated in *La Gazzetta*: “beyond the athletic victory shines the victory of the race.” In this vein, a general belief began to emerge that Fascism had created a type of Nietzschean superman.

**Oriundo? Rimpatriato? Italiano Nuovo?**

Giuseppe Meazza was the most obvious ‘superman’. However, while he personified much of what the regime wished to convey to the masses, he also exposed a number of contradictions that Fascist society was unable to either resolve or accommodate. Known by his nickname of Balilla, due to the young age at which he made his Serie A debut, Meazza was the team’s irreplaceable goalscorer, a naturally individualistic role that exposed the ethical dilemma of outstanding individual contributions to the collective good. Moreover, in the light of growing racial awareness, Meazza’s positive representation as the identikit Fascist Italian male set an example that some believed the *oriundi/rimpatriati* could never match.

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By nature of their responsibilities, strikers were individuals less easily restricted to the confines of the collective. Meazza, as the leading exponent in Italy, symbolised a natural fetish for goals that threatened to undermine the frequently cited organic team ethic, as noted by Mario Rossi in *Lo Sport Fascista*:

Calcio should shun the “prima donna” because it is essentially a collective sport. However in every city and town, each squad has a player - it is worth saying one eleventh of the group - who, rising above the others through intrinsic quality, [...] comes to be a symbol of those cities. Thus, no striker could prosper without the service and support of his teammates and, however successful that individual might be, his achievements had to be placed within the context of the team. It was yet another unsubtle allegory for the relationship between the individual and society that *Il Popolo d’Italia* specifically applied to Meazza:

The secret of our strength is in the type of game that the Italian half-back knows how to adopt. With two men of the highest class, like Meazza and Ferrari, it needs a half-back of class that passes the ball precisely, who knows how to use cunning, who is able to favour intelligence over brute force.

Despite Meazza representing the loose cannon in the *azzurri*’s armoury, as the quintessential *Italiano nuovo*, he also provided a direct contrast with the *oriundi* that formed the core of the successful teams of the 1930s. For primarily economic motives, mass emigration from southern Italy began in the period of unification (1861). Although there are no exact statistics, by 1914 there were an estimated five to six million Italians living abroad. Consequently, by the mid-1920s, there was no shortage of high-class footballers with Italian roots playing in South America, where the game had an even stronger history. Unfortunately, their recruitment had been outlawed by one of the Carta di Viareggio’s more short-sighted measures. Quick to exploit this untapped source of talent, rather than repeal the law, the regime chose to overcome it by introducing joint citizenship. As Pozzo recalled: ‘I spoke with Arpinati. And he told me: “According to Italian law, the sons of Italians born abroad are considered Italians”.’ Thus the *rimpatriato* – returnee - was immediately eligible to play not only in Serie A but also for the national team.

After impressing at the 1928 Olympic Games for Argentina, one of the first to make an impact at both the Italian club and the national level was Raimondo Orsi, signed by Juventus for L.100,000, a FIAT 509 and a salary of L.8,000 per month. So controversial was his transfer that protests by the Argentine Federation forced Orsi to remain in a type of *calcio*

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134 ‘La classifica dei “canonieri” è incentivo al gioco individuale?’, *Lo Sport Fascista*, 10, 1933, p.46.
quarantine for one season, before he could finally make his debut. In a portentous complaint to the FIGC, the Argentine Federation wrote a stinging condemnation of the regime’s unscrupulous and unprincipled strengthening of its team:

“The Italians want to form a national team at the cost of Argentine football...The Fascist government, impressed by the value of Argentine players and wanting to make Fascist football appear the best in the world, has set its eyes on well known Creole players and wants to tie them to Italian clubs to make them Italian players.”

Among the 47 players that came from South America to play in Italy during the interwar period, Guaita, Cesarini, the Brazilian Filo and Luisito Monti all followed Orsi into the Italian national team, with Monti proving an especially interesting case having already represented Argentina in the 1930 World Cup. While Monti’s dual nationality might have appeared as diluting the Italian success, the opposite argument suggested that his Italian roots were clearly identifiable in the robust nature of his game. In this sense, Monti and some of the other oriundi/rimpatriati stars, as outsiders, defined some aspects of the ‘true’ Italian footballer.

In Lo Sport Illustrato, Mario Zappa drew attention to the apparent differences between Latin American and Italian players by arguing that it was more than just an issue of talent; there was also a difference in temperament and mental habits. For the Latin American the prize was the game itself and not the result. Their preference for dribbling provoked Zappa’s exasperation, with only Monti proving the real exception to this ‘rule’. Furthermore, with the exceptions of Monti, Orsi and Guaita, he suggested that their fetish for dribbling implied that South American footballers could not be trusted in the team’s key positions:

‘The Italian player instead tends towards simplicity, the quick game, the result obtained by the direct route....the art of the South American is to play the game, our art is to resolve the game.’ Thus, according to Zappa’s rationale, Monti could be entrusted with the team’s crucial central role by virtue of his uncorrupted Italian roots.

Yet, despite some questions that were being asked regarding their true right to belong to the Italian race, Tomabuoni refused to deny their fundamental role in the tactical development of the Italian game, which built on the earlier and equally important influx of Austrian and Hungarian players. Essentially, he argued that the South Americans had developed an original game that Italian football could learn from.

139 Quoted in Ibid., p.100.
Even as early as 1934, after the *azzurri's* first major international success, the issue of joint-nationality players was brought into serious question. After a meeting within the FIGC to consider the impact of the *oriundi*, following accusations that their presence was weakening the Italian game, it was decided that their commitment to Italy was the most important issue. As *La Gazzetta* made clear, if they came to Italy and made use of dual nationality, they needed to do so as Italians otherwise they would meet sanctions that all Italian sports fans were told they would approve of.\(^\text{141}\)

While there was clearly a general desire to make full use of the excellent *rimpatriati* that were available, there was opposition to the likes of De Maria who returned to Argentina to carry out his national service. Such exploitation of joint nationality was said to have been contrary to the Fascist spirit, as players were either completely Italian or not. Joining the debate, *Il Bargello* argued that it was ‘time to resolve this situation that is compromising the good name of Fascist Italy….we say that one who has not carried out his military obligations cannot and should not be considered an Italian citizen.’\(^\text{142}\)

The issue was further intensified by the impending Ethiopian campaign that prompted World Cup winner Guaita plus two other *rimpatriati*, Scopelli and Stagnaro, to attempt to leave the country before their military call-up.\(^\text{143}\) All three were discovered at the Italian-French border complete with their considerable earnings, which further reduced the credibility of returnees in general. Military service was certainly an obligation that the identikit Italian Giuseppe Meazza carried out,\(^\text{144}\) which reflected badly upon those *rimpatriati* that were less enthusiastic about performing their patriotic duties. For this reason, despite their contribution to Italy’s international football success, questions continued to be asked regarding their right to a place in the national team.

However, despite appearing as yet another obvious allegory for society as a whole, it offered an interesting definition of the requirements of an Italian. While it continued to be suggested that the *oriundi/rimpatriati* could not really be considered Italian, Zanetti and Tornabuoni argued that the original restrictions had not been introduced to promote ties of race and blood but to defend the concept of Italian citizenship. Blood was less important than a ‘clear and general proof of patriotism’\(^\text{145}\) from the players returning from South America.


\(^{142}\) ‘Italiano o argentino?’, *Il Bargello*, 13/5/34, p.2.


This not only showed Fascism’s concern with commitment to the cause more than blood and genes, but also the flexible nature of Italian Fascist identity. Replicating the way various cities throughout the peninsula had been able to establish their own, often contrasting, identities, there was also space for individuals to express themselves within the broad boundaries of acceptability.

**Italy breaks the mould - Metodo v Sistema**

If there were question marks over the nationality of some players in the azzurri’s incredible success story, the manner and style of the victories were deemed Italian beyond doubt. Generally reflecting the mood of the press, Mario Zappa commented upon how the ‘Italian squad has opened everybody’s eyes: it has shown a model of play that is the synthesis of the best elements in all of the most admired systems’. If correct - and there is convincing evidence for this - it questions the justification of numerous references to a specifically Italian style play. On closer inspection, this claim suggests that the success was, in fact, built on a mixture of the best elements of European football. Moreover, when necessary, the team was more than capable of matching the brute force of others that was so maligned in the Italian press.

Calcio’s ‘Duce’, in control of the azzurri’s organic collective from 1929-48, was the Italian coach or commissario unico, Vittorio Pozzo. His simple strategy was also to create a group of players that was stronger than the sum of its constituent parts, which left little room for individuals. However, it was impossible to ignore both the obvious stars that emerged, such as Meazza, and the potentially destructive local rivalries that derived from club competition in the national league and were forcibly subsumed beneath the team ethic. It was a simple philosophy to which Bruno Roghi attributed the azzurri’s retention of the World Cup in 1938: ‘Football is a collective game. Much will and many brains need to converge and immerse themselves in the unity of the squad. From the multiplicity of strengths needs to emerge the harmony of the collective.’

The squad also represented the idealised Fascist society by blending survivors from the 1934 and 1936 triumphs with a number of debutantes, thereby reflecting the Futurist influenced theory that the Italian race could strengthen itself through conflict, permanent change and the consistent introduction of new blood. New faces revitalised the ageing areas

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146. Il fresco stile nuovo degli azzurri’, *La Gazzetta*, p. 4.
of the team while providing competition within the collective unit. Combined with the regime’s physical, moral and spiritual education, it guaranteed the *Italiano nuovo* could be relied upon to struggle to the death. As *La Nazione* observed, the squad possessed ‘the quality to defend the colours of Italy and also the spirit of Fascism. It will fight serenely without arrogance and a false sense of modesty’.

It was not just the press that increasingly made militaristic references to *calcio*. When mentally preparing the squad, Pozzo sometimes used nationalist imagery and combative techniques to stress the players’ roles as representatives of the nation and the regime. It was an especially important aspect of preparation that Tornabuoni had already highlighted in his detailed chronicle of *calcio*’s rise:

> The psychological factor is decisive and instrumental for the Latin people and Italians in particular! It is necessary however that our people be motivated...by the spring of passion, that naturally has the most beautiful and noble expression of love for the motherland....
> The Italian soldier needs to have strong feelings for a noble cause: then he overcomes every obstacle and becomes irresistible.

In his biography, published in the 1960s, Pozzo attempted to play down the extent of his nationalist mind games: ‘I have read a lot in recent years...that before sending the team onto the field, I more or less served the players a strong dose of patriotic and nationalistic ideas...They are all stories from people who were neither there nor interested in football.’ However, he was unable to completely deny juxtaposing the players contemporary responsibilities with the wartime sacrifices of their ancestors. The most frequently cited example refers to the team’s match against Hungary in 1930. During the journey to Budapest, the squad was taken to the First World War battlefields of Oslavia and Gorizia before stopping at the monumental cemetery at Redupiglia. As the players paused among the tombs of the war dead, Pozzo drew attention to the sacrifices their forefathers had made for the motherland: ‘I told them it was good that the sad and terrible spectacle might have struck them: that whatever would be asked of us on that occasion, was nothing compared with those that had lost their lives on those surrounding hills.’ The azzurri’s subsequent 5-0 destruction of the Magyar team was warmly received by the regime. In addition to apparently instilling a greater sense of dedication to the national cause among the players, the visit also contributed to the media’s metaphorical militarisation of the squad.

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150 Pozzo, *Quarant’anni*, pp.143-44.
Pozzo never received any payment for his work as *commissario unico*, choosing instead to rely upon one of his many established careers, namely that as a football journalist.\(^{152}\) He proved to be a prolific and, more often than not, objective writer, even if it did seem rather like putting the wolf in charge of the sheep pen. In his regular, lengthy submissions - to publications such as *La Nazione*, *Il Resto del Carlino*, *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, and *La Stampa*, to name but a few - it was not unusual for him to criticise his team’s performances. He also penned more portentous pieces that seem to have been preparing the readership - and perhaps the regime - for the possibility of defeat.

Pozzo’s skills undoubtedly included a good awareness of football tactics, but diplomacy, man-management and cunning were equal features of his success. He used the latter particularly well to cloud the issue of his party membership, which, when combined with the continued restriction of access to his personal archive, may explain why the nature of his relationship with the regime hierarchy has remained an area of considerable speculation.\(^{153}\) As he stated in his biography: ‘I was not even a member of the Party. I was a free citizen that had his profession that had nothing in common with politics.’\(^{154}\) However, in an article published in the 1960s, he clouded the issue when referring to the abuse the players received from the French public in 1938: ‘They did not know...that we were for sport and not politics, and that a great number of us had Party membership in 1934, in the preceding World Cup.’\(^{155}\) In many respects, Pozzo’s and the players’ membership of the party, or otherwise, tells us little and is even harder to substantiate. Furthermore, it has already been established that players needed to be members of CONI, which was of course an organ of the party. However, if Pozzo had never been a PNF member and if, as he said, he was rarely under pressure from the regime, his nationalistic motivational techniques may indicate the extent to which the regime’s ideas were penetrating the masses through *calcio*.

His nationalism was also supported by the sports press that helped create a certain mythology around the team’s tactical and technical merits, as well as its alleged adherence to the spirit of fair play. Fascist Italy was not only proud of the azzurri’s victories, but also of the manner in which the team had apparently torn up the *calcio* rule book and tactically transformed the game, the three victories testimony to their superiority over all but the

\(^{152}\) Pozzo, ‘Il fallimento del calcio...’, *Successo*, p.108.
\(^{153}\) He also worked in Milan as an office manager for Pirelli.
\(^{154}\) See ‘La vita di Pozzo diventa storia’, *La Repubblica*, 20/5/93, p.27; ‘Pozzo? Macchè Fascista...’, *La Repubblica*, 21/5/93, p.27.
\(^{155}\) Pozzo, *Quarant’anni*, p.118.
English. However, when necessary, the allegedly skilful Italiano nuovo could easily and quickly transform into the Italiano duro (hard man).

As a 1932 Lo Stadio editorial noted: 'In the 10th year of the Fascist era the youth are toughened for battle, and for the battle, and more for the game itself, courage, determination, gladiatorial pride, chosen sentiments of our race, cannot be excluded.'\textsuperscript{156} Not surprisingly, players from such a combative Italian physical education, trained to fight and never concede defeat, began to earn a reputation abroad for aggression, which contrasted with the subtlety, style and fair play that was promoted at home.

An early example of this was brought to the attention of the Ministry of the Interior in 1929, prior to an encounter with Germany. The reason was the azzurri's earlier matches with Czechoslovakia and Austria; the team's performances being memorable for their violence and aggression. On arrival in Italy prior to match, the German representative, Kurt Schimmer, warned the Italians in no uncertain terms that his team was 'well prepared for the Italian “game” and that if..[they]..repeat the effort of Prague and Vienna, they will have many broken tibia'.\textsuperscript{157}

Despite the 2-1 victory for Germany the match passed without incident. However, the opposition's fears were a sign that, when required, Pozzo's Italian game plan could resort to more than just superior technique and tactics. It was a practice that some parts of the press, such as Lo Stadio, decried in general, because kicks, punches and barging were said to have been against the tradition and the spirit of the Italian game. However, it was more likely they conflicted with the image the press was trying to construct: 'Such spectacles disgust. And as it is more often the home player committing such disgraceful acts, the public does not shout or protest so as not to harm its player, often because it consents to such acts.'\textsuperscript{158}

In his various newspaper columns, Pozzo frequently railed against the increasing use of rough and violent play that, in his opinion, was disrupting the game's technical development. As he noted in 1929: 'some of the squads in the championship go onto the pitch in a mood that is clearly hostile, which is contrary to the good of the game. It is win at all costs, it is the bitter grudge against the adversary, it is the preoccupation of the result to the ends of the league table.'\textsuperscript{159}

\textsuperscript{156} 'Virilità e vigliaccheria', Lo Stadio, 9/10/32 p.1.
\textsuperscript{157} ACS, PS 1929, b.180, D.14 Sports e Gare, n.34384, 'Prefettura di Bolzano al Ministero Interno', 18/4/29.
\textsuperscript{158} 'Virilità e vigliaccheria', Lo Stadio, 9/10/32 p.1.
\textsuperscript{159} 'Fioriture pericolose', Il Littoriale, 24/1/29, p.1.
Despite placing much of the responsibility for this change upon the attitudes of the players themselves, the increasing ‘win at all costs’ approach was clearly related to the formation of the national league and the consequent intensification of campanilismo. This had resulted in the win bonuses that Pozzo so despised: ‘The win bonus guarantees genuine competition...but it constitutes one of the strongest springs to that “win at all costs” spirit and sense of intolerance that have the consequences we all know.’ It was yet another contradiction for which the regime had no real answer. While win bonuses guaranteed the type of competitive matches that had been lacking from the old league system, they also increased the need to win. In turn, this intensified local rivalries to such an extent that the technical development of the game, which the Carta di Viareggio was supposed to safeguard, appeared to be seriously threatened.

Following the azzurrì's defeat by Germany in Turin, Pozzo openly criticised the Italian team’s obsession with victory. This, he believed, explained its continuing lack of progress and inability to think clearly about the best approach for each game, which demanded the combination of calm, caution, precision and technique within a single game plan. Prioritising the collective and imposing discipline and obedience upon the individual was his formula for success. It clearly appealed to Arpinati, who appointed him as commissario unico soon after. The most revealing aspect of the article, however, was the insight into Pozzo’s ideals as to how the azzurrì should have been playing and thus what could be expected of his team:

The game is beautiful, technical, interesting and fascinating when it constructs, when it gives life to something, when it thinks and works, not when it simply demolishes, defends, destroys and suffocates. Man has true merit when he does something of his own, that is alone: not when he limits himself to knocking down what others have built.

Despite his admirable defence of the constructive game, this was open to sacrifice when the all-important result looked in danger, his side proving on more than one occasion that brawn rather than brain could also be effective. Facing the Spanish in Bilbao in 1931, Pozzo identified the main threat as Aguirrezabala and planned accordingly: ‘I reasoned that, if I succeeded in cutting off the head with which the eleven adversaries thought, the whole system would collapse. I told Cesarini...to permanently mark and disturb him.’ It proved a

160 Ibid., p.1.
162 Ibid., p.1.
163 Pozzo, Quarant’anni, p.161.
negative and ruthlessly effective method of securing a draw with one of the strongest teams in Europe.

The two teams met again in Florence during the 1934 World Cup, Pozzo’s mixture of subtlety and steel once again designed to frustrate the Spanish and stop them playing. Contested in front of an impassioned Florentine crowd and an array of local and national Fascist figures, it was more akin to a battle than a football match, exactly the type of contest that the *Italiano nuovo* had been trained/bred for. With the teams inseparable after extra-time the game was replayed the following day. Pozzo likened the post match dressing rooms to an infirmary, and was forced to use four new players, while the *azzurri*’s excesses, led by Monti, forced the Spanish to make seven changes. Of the 22 that started the first game, only 11 made it to the second, when, according to Phil Ball’s history of Spanish football, they kicked ‘the remaining Spaniards into oblivion.’

The essence of Pozzo’s tactic was an adaptation of the English ‘WM’ system to the Italian game, thereby forming the *metodo* style that was more flexible and difficult to defeat. Most importantly, it differed to the English game and the Danubian ‘*sistema*’. While the Italian playing positions, as part of the *metodo*, were more specific and do not satisfactorily translate into English, the technical innovation saw the ‘WM’ central defender move into the midfield area of play, to become a third, central *terzino, centro mediano* or half-back. From this subtle change, the English ‘WM’ was adapted to become became Italy’s ‘WW’ (see below). Pozzo built the team around the key *centro mediano* role; it was a position that Luisito Monti aggressively made his own. However, as opposed to being the focus of the *azzurri*’s attacking options, his game was tailored more towards destroying the opposition’s pattern of play.

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The tactical twist, which had actually been more or less employed by the dominant Juventus team since 1930, laid the foundations of the azzurri's incredible success while, in the process, apparently rejecting the English orthodoxy. The subtle differences between the two systems requires no further consideration in this study, beyond saying that over the years a number of slightly different versions of metodo and sistema developed. In fact, so subtle and complex were the differences that there is no general agreement as to when the concept of metodo entered calcio’s lexicon or even if it ever specifically referred to the Italian game.\(^{166}\)

Following the World Cup victory in 1938, Mario Zappa cut through the technical jargon to describe in layman terms what he saw as the impact of Pozzo’s changes. The ‘big secret of the Italian squad is in its capacity to attack with the least amount of men possible, without ever distracting the half-backs from their defensive work.’\(^{167}\) Others, though, were less convinced about the significance of the tactical innovation, Carlin’s prosaic analysis in the sports weekly Guerin Sportivo further stimulating debate in 1929. In response, the journalist Scipione Picchi\(^{168}\) suggested in Lo Stadio that tactical considerations were something of a red herring, as an outstanding team like Juventus would succeed irrespective of its strategy.\(^{169}\) Although the importance of developing tactical awareness in calcio cannot be underestimated, if Picchi’s argument is applied to the national team, the merits of Pozzo’s new and apparently Italian system of play must be questioned: he may just have been the fortunate heir to the regime’s talented generation. Furthermore, as Christian Bromberger has observed, style needs to be considered not just as a simple reflex from practice but as a stereotyped image that a collective has for itself and hopes to transmit to others: ‘In this sense, the style of a squad is part of a “mentality” or of a “public imagination…. It is a valid compromise between a real and imagined identity”’, all of which accords perfectly with the example of the azzurri in this period.\(^{170}\)

Either way, the most important thing for the regime was that the azzurri were winning and, for whatever reason, they were winning in a style that was perceived to be undermining the long established notion of English supremacy. However, without demeaning the Coppa

\(^{166}\) For a detailed discussion of the various terms and styles of sistema and metodo, see F. Marri, ‘Metodo, sistema e derivati nel linguaggio calcistico’, Ludus. Sport e Loisir, 3, 1992, pp.86-101.
\(^{167}\) ‘Il fresco stile nuovo degli azzurri’, La Gazzetta, 22/6/38, p.4.
\(^{168}\) Picchi was also a Fiorentina vice-president.
\(^{169}\) ‘Un fattore essenziale e trascurato dai tanti teorici filosofi sui sistemi’, Lo Stadio, 4/12/32, p.2.
d’Europa and the Olympic Games, in the world of football England was the ultimate test. Unfortunately for Italy, the English Football Association’s decision not to enter the World Cup tournaments and its desire to keep the team’s continental appearances to a minimum, meant meetings with the azzurri were few and far between and consequently highly charged. Besides aesthetic and tactical comparisons, there was also a political edge to the contests: the Fascist representative eleven confronted not only what some considered to be the strongest football team in the world but also the leading representative of liberal democracy.

For the regime, results between the two held a deeper national significance as achievement on the field was equated with success off of it. However tactical innovation was dressed up, England was still the ultimate hurdle for Italy. Prior to 1933, only some British club teams had played in Italy, one occasion being the visit of Newcastle United in 1929. The robust nature of Newcastle’s play provoked a strong reaction from Italian supporters, who had already been incited by the nationalist press prior to the game. The agitated Ambrosiana (Inter) fans gave the English team a hot, rather than warm, welcome and an even livelier post match reception at their hotel, where a government telegram referred to a police presence that was required to protect the team from 300 or so protesting fans.\(^{171}\)

When the national teams met for the first time in 1933, Pozzo declared the match: ‘A decisive meeting between the best continental footballers and the prodigious maestros of the art.’\(^{172}\) The contrast between the two teams was always portrayed in terms of their differing styles of play; the English strength apparently rooted in efficiency, preparation and fitness more than technique. Undeterred by the 1-1 draw, Giuseppe Centauro still extolled the more virtuous Italian style:

> because it is more in keeping with the spectacular content of a football match, more varied in its stylistic displays, richer in imagination and thus more picturesque and artistic. Our eminently Latin temperament feels more the charm of a match that might have something abstract, that sharp creative spirit of the athletes, rather than a game duty bound to calculations and multiplication tables.\(^{173}\)

His criticisms echoed the suggestion that the Italian game was more artistic, spontaneous and creative, unlike the English machine that was restricted by rules. The only lesson Italian football could apparently learn from the English was that of fitness, which, when combined with the technical preference for metodo (method), he believed would soon make calcio and the azzurri supreme.

\(^{171}\) ACS, PS 1929, b.180, D.14 Sports e Gare, Ministero dell’Interno, Telegramma n.23342, 19/5/29.
\(^{172}\) ‘Un confronto decisivo fra I migliori calciatori continentali e I prodigiosi maestri dell’arte’, La Nazione, 13/5/33, p.6.
In November 1934, having just won the second World Cup, the azzurri went to London to face England in what was portrayed as not only a contest between the two best teams in the world but also one between the respective nations’ political ideologies. The regime coveted the opportunity so much that Pozzo, an accomplished speaker of English, was despatched to the English FA to organise the fixture. Contrary to what he believed was in the azzurri’s best interests, Pozzo claimed he was forced to accept the fixture in London for the autumn of 1934:

In London, when I heard, as I feared, that we would have to play immediately in October (sic) and at Arsenal’s ground, I objected. I telephoned Rome to express my contrary thoughts. Nothing doing. In Rome, at a high level - and it was a political interference - somebody was in high spirits. It was necessary to accept.  

Pozzo’s recollection of the game’s importance for the regime was supported by the secretary of the English FA, Stanley Rous, who naturally had his own agenda when recalling the match as the unofficial world title decider:

The England team in the thirties was very powerful, and we were the side that every country wanted to play and beat. Mussolini’s offer of huge bonuses to his team for the Highbury game in 1934 was only a reflection of the immense prestige that was gained by any country beating England. Italy at least clearly regarded this as just as important as winning the World Cup! While it is difficult to substantiate Rous’ claims about Italian win bonuses, his remarks do indicate the high profile and important nature of the match in the 1934 football calendar, which was also reflected in the Italian press.

In the build up to the ‘battle of Highbury’, Bruno Roghi stabbed his pen at those across the Channel: ‘These people show a very enjoyable ignorance of too many things that happen in the sporting world of the continent. They ask questions that alarm more than surprise...Are the English so ignorant of sport on the continent because of ostentation, naivety or lack of interest?’ Albeit offensively phrased he had a point, for if England had lost the match there would have been a general sense of amazement, when the difference in quality between the two teams was negligible. Furthermore, perceptions of the English island mentality were strengthened by a cartoon in The Daily Mail that was reprinted in La Gazzetta, whereby each member of the Italian team was stereotypically portrayed with a ridiculous moustache.

174 Pozzo, Quarant’anni, pp.213-14.
175 S. Rous, Football Worlds, A Lifetime in Sport, Newton Abbot, Readers Union, 1979, p.62
177 ‘Spirito Inglese’, La Gazzetta, 11/11/34, p.3.
Nonetheless, Roghi’s article, in which he referred to Highbury Stadium as ‘the theatre of international war’, was provocative and clearly designed to stir the home market rather than say anything particularly insightful about the game.\(^{178}\) As the match approached he became more reticent, publishing a list of reasons why Italy might not win and, most importantly, why it was not possible to consider it as the World Cup final. His argument was again logical, but there was also an overriding sense of him preparing the way for a dignified defeat, from which Italy would cling onto the status it had fought so hard to gain earlier in the year. It was a prescient move. Following the 3-2 defeat that was recorded in calcio folklore for the English foul play and the Italian resilience, the press salvaged whatever positives it could muster from the match.

In spite of the regime’s enthusiasm for another crack at the English anytime, any place, anywhere, Emilio Colombo drew attention to the numerous disadvantages that the Italian team had faced. Among these was an extreme sense of outrage at the loss of Monti following a heavy challenge four minutes into the game: ‘No, they were not enough the advantages offered to the rivals: the field, fans, date, surroundings, climate. The match also wanted Monti sacrificed.’\(^{179}\) The sense of injustice contrasted strongly with the cheers that had accompanied his liquidation of the Spanish team in June, before he stamped his mark on the final; after which the Swedish referee Eklind commented that ‘some Italians were initially a little excessive, and I refer to Monti.’\(^{180}\)

Even Pozzo took exception to the rough treatment his key player had received in London, defending him as the most correct player around, who played the ball and not the man. It was somewhat incongruous with Pozzo’s declaration that the player had ‘a big personal problem with the danubians - who he considered all the same, and made him “see red”’.\(^{181}\) While such a contradictory sense of injustice is probably a consistent feature among many football fans, it did further underline the fundamental weakness in the argument that calcio had developed a sense of style and fair play that compared so positively with English football.

Nonetheless, the Italian press continued to vindicate its team by suggesting it had exposed the physical English approach; the Fascist magazine Libro e Moschetto making the unsubstantiated claim that, unlike the English, Italian players did not know how to illegally

\(^{178}\) ‘Al di là della muraglia cinese…’, *La Gazzetta*, p.3.
\(^{181}\) Pozzo, *Quarant’anni*, p.215.
charge and obstruct adversaries, nor did they want to.\(^{182}\) Similarly, in *La Gazzetta*, Colombo argued that, despite losing, the Italian players had morally triumphed with their greater intelligence and technical skills in the face of brute force and ignorance: ‘The English overwhelmed our squad with the same impetus and with the same - how to say it? crude violence that we saw unfurl against the Wunderteam in the first twenty five minutes of the England-Austria match two years or so ago.’\(^{183}\) It was indicative of how the most patriotic elements of the press hoped the English would accept their weaknesses and recognise the apparent ‘ruins of their grotesque system of play, thrown into the air by the Italians’.\(^{184}\)

Facing the English numerical advantage, it was the spirit of struggle that had apparently enabled the *azzurri* to strike back when down and out, scoring twice in the second half to run England close. As Colombo saw it, the ‘boxer with the better technique imposed his real style upon the violent rival. The heart, intelligence, passionate flame of the azzurri players achieved everything that our Italian and Fascist faith was desperately waiting for.’\(^{185}\) Even though England had thrown the knockout punch, the *azzurri*’s refusal to submit to the reported English aggression was enough for the press to turn the defeat into a moral victory, Colombo’s pronouncements in *La Gazzetta* representing the mood: ‘The adversaries were distinguished by different characteristics. The Englishman is a colossus or...seems a colossus. The Italian is more elegant, subtler. Art against force?...The colossus threw itself violently against the stylist, that defended itself as it could.’\(^{186}\)

Giovanni Ferrari picked up the baton in *Lo Sport Fascista* by arguing that: ‘We have morally beaten them abroad, in the heart, and we more than matched them in the technique of the game.’\(^{187}\) Bruno Roghi went even further by suggesting that the English had in fact won nothing: ‘There is an English phrase that literally translates like so: “Saving face”. And they have saved face.’\(^{188}\) Ignoring the result, Roghi declared the *azzurri*’s efforts vengeance on behalf of Europe and a victory for the game itself. ‘The Italian squad, splendid representatives of Fascism and at the same time avengers for sporting Europe, gave the English a terrible lesson. It said clearly that calcio is first of all an art. It said that the destructive game...is the mortification of the sport.’\(^{189}\)

\(^{184}\) ‘Successo dello spirito della squadra’, *La Gazzetta*, p.1.
\(^{188}\) ‘Successo dello spirito della squadra’, *La Gazzetta*, 15/11/34, p.1
Once more, even in defeat, the ‘soldiers of sport’ had apparently defended the nation and the Fascist faith on a hostile foreign field. As Roghi explained to the English, but with more significance for the Italian readership: ‘the azzurri players came into your house, on your sports ground (the Arsenal ground is the Oxford of English football), and by a whisker failed to give you the biggest shock of your life.’ It was an argument that Colombo further developed on La Gazzetta’s front page:

What other squad and what other champions, if not those toughened at the school and raised in the climate of Fascist sport, would have been able to write a page so rich of deeds and so full of lessons that the ten men of the Italian national team added to the history of international football?

Intoxicated by the achievement of the ‘Athletes of Fascism’, he even went so far as to refer to the ‘victory’ of the organic unit that represented the regime and the nation. They ‘emanated, the class and the style, the technique and the skill...the ten athletes played like a platoon of gladiators. Ten combatants, one heart.’ It was left to Roghi to add the final polish to La Gazzetta’s veneered presentation of the result: ‘the Italian squad returns to the Motherland with a defeat that is worth twice as much as a victory.’

Despite such extreme patriotism, criticisms of the English game had some justification, based as it had always been upon a mixture of technique and strength. However, in the process of attacking it so virulently, these articles were further developing the idea of an innovative and unique style Italian play. As with many aspects of life under the regime, defining the characteristics of the outsider made a significant contribution to establishing what was essentially Italian. Thus, identifying and castigating the English game created the perceived or desired identity of the preferred Italian version: fair play, style, superior technique, tactical improvisation and imagination being the prominent features. While this is not to say that calcio did not possess all of these elements, as it had certainly become one of the leaders of world football, the created myth was different to reality.

Sometimes skilfully and other times more aggressively, calcio Italiano had kicked the nation into world supremacy on the football field, winning it international respect in the process. Diplomatically, the international victories plus the successful organisation of the 1934 World Cup won Fascist Italy international kudos. Domestically, to a certain degree, it had also united the nation around the national team.

190 ‘Successo dello spirito...’, La Gazzetta, p.3.
192 Ibid., p.1.
As the victories and the positive benefits of sporting success became more apparent, so the regime increasingly chose to associate itself, through words and symbols, with the champions that its policies had contributed to creating. Following the changes imposed by the Carta di Viareggio, the politicisation of calcio was such that even club teams, when competing abroad, were hijacked by the regime and robbed of their individual city-based identities. Consequently, their matches often reflected and sometimes worsened Italian diplomatic relations in this period, although the press attempted to redress the balance by reporting as many positive responses as possible to each Italian success. Despite this, international football did have positive diplomatic aspects for the regime. Besides winning admiration for the quality of its team’s play, the 1934 World Cup tournament gave the regime the opportunity to parade Fascist Italy’s athletic elite, organisational skills, imagination and, above all, its new sense of nation.

In addition to its diplomatic importance, international calcio success also had a positive domestic impact. Besides becoming a cause célèbre behind which the regime could attempt to mobilise the masses, the team also exemplified the ideal of Fascist society, in which the individual gave his all for the good of the whole. The azzurri’s victories in this period enabled the regime (and those who wrote on its behalf) to argue that this was an indication of the progress that Italy was making under Fascism, how its investment in the new generation was finally bringing the international respect and recognition that they demanded.

However, while calcio provided the perfect allegory for the merits of the idealised Fascist society, it also failed to resolve - and thereby exposed - many of the contradictions that existed within the constructed Italian Fascist identity. While calcio’s merit as a team game was consistently promoted, the superstars and talented individuals that naturally arose could not be ignored, thereby undermining the fundamental ethic of ‘Team Italy’. In fact, the unfortunate reality was that characters such as Meazza held the keys to success. Moreover, while the azzurri victories were triumphs for Fascist Italy, the presence of first generation Italians, some of which had already competed for other national teams, forced a certain amount of national and sometimes racial introspection. Without implying that the oriundi/rimpatriati undermined the azzurri’s achievements in anyway, their presence did force the leaders and opinion formers in Fascist Italy to consider exactly what their crucial roles in the sporting flagship meant for the nation’s identity.
Ultimately, their presence only became a serious issue following the introduction of
the racial laws, under pressure from Nazi Germany, in 1938. Thus, in a similar way to the
architectural diversity that was permitted during the stadium building era, it seems reasonable
to suggest that their presence was, in fact, indicative of the flexible nature of Italian identity.
Although some question marks placed against the players' commitment had racial
undertones, it was justified more out of concern for their commitment to the regime than the
nature of their blood. Aware that calcio was a most effective tool to not only reach out and
touch the masses but also to improve its international respect, the regime allowed
considerable space for diversity and individual expression in all aspects of the game. This
accounts for the eclectic mix of individuals, ideas and projects that have been considered in
this thesis, which the majority of Fascism's hierarchy believed would serve and strengthen
the regime's hegemony.
Conclusion

In 1926, Fascism intervened in calcio because it was the biggest mass cultural leisure-time activity in the country. Whether as players, spectators, newspaper readers or radio listeners, the masses had seized the game and made it their own. For the regime, it was quite simply a ready-made opportunity for the mass mobilisation of society. Through its restructuring of the calcio phenomenon, Fascism attempted to construct a sense of Italian identity and community that it was hoped might contribute to the establishment of consensus among the masses, thereby further legitimising the regime's rule.

The first and perhaps most obvious conclusion is that calcio was unquestionably politicised towards Fascism’s needs in a variety of ways. Although it might be slightly deterministic to expect the socio-cultural features of northern Europe’s Labour movement to apply to Italy’s more agrarian working class, in this period Italian cities were industrialising and the urban masses expanding. Exploiting this opening and that presented by the failure of Socialism and the Church to recognise sport’s potential to mobilise mass interest and support, the Fascist regime took the opportunity to both develop and direct the masses’ passion. While physically, morally and spiritually regenerating the nation that Fascists believed had degenerated under liberal democracy, the regime sought to engender a sense of community and shared experience among the masses through calcio.

Both buildings and bodies were focal points in the regime’s plan to regenerate society along Fascist lines. Forming subtle but nonetheless crucial components of its new, constructed, and idealised identity, somewhat contradictorily they also exposed and intensified those already existing throughout the peninsula. Creating or inventing a sense of collective identity and tradition was a significant aspect of the regime’s regeneration programme. However, as Stefano Cavazza has suggested in his study of the restoration of provincial festivals and folklore under the regime, these more often represent a resumption or manipulation of former historical traditions and legends that were applied to the needs of the era.¹

Cavazza’s theory can certainly be applied to football, calcio fiorentino being the obvious example of a long established football-type game that was successfully resurrected in the 1930s. Unlike the tennis style game of volata, which was invented as a specifically Fascist game but failed to capture the public’s imagination, the ancient Florentine form of
calcio provided a long standing tradition upon which the modern format could be constructed. Even if calcio fiorentino is rejected as the ancient predecessor of the modern game, calcio proper still had approximately 30 years’ history behind it. Rather than invent a new tradition, the regime seized that of calcio and adapted it to display and promulgate its vision of society. To what extent this was idealised and falsified naturally warrants consideration, but neither does this detract from the value of assessing exactly what this idealised society consisted of, as seen through the prism of calcio.

Firstly it should be noted how calcio was an obvious opportunity for the regime to express its view of organic society, whereby a leader figure conducted the collective mass in which individuals were de-personalised and their needs subsumed. Although subservient to the organic whole every individual was nonetheless crucial to its function, which demanded all were physically and psychologically able to meet their commitments and responsibilities. To achieve this, the regime’s national regeneration programme was embodied in the Italiano nuovo. The characteristics of this mythologised figure were theoretically evident among Fascist footballers that needed to show heroism, sacrifice and commitment to the team’s cause, in the pursuit of global football domination. In this way, footballers set examples to the masses on two levels: firstly, by displaying the importance of individual physical and mental fitness and, secondly, showing how this should be directed towards benefiting the organic whole.

If society was to be regenerated to the levels of mental and physical fitness demanded, Fascism needed more than just schools and training programmes. To help reach its goals the new found strength among the population was continually honed and bound into a collective experience through metaphorical and occasionally very real struggles, battles and wars. Politicised calcio provided regular imaginary and very real opportunities for struggle and combat, especially once international competitions for clubs and countries assumed significance that went beyond mere sporting contests. For the regime, while confirming the Italian presence abroad, international football also acted as focus around which a sense of national unity could be encouraged, directed and disciplined, as La Gazzetta pointed out on the eve of the 1938 World Cup in France:

The Fascist revolution...has stirred the vigour of the race in sport, it has created the sporting spirit among the masses, of which a warlike spirit is known to be a direct descendant. Thus the gymnasia and stadia have been increased tenfold, the legions of militant youngsters have multiplied by hundreds, and within a decade the most functional and perfect facilities have brought us the strongest and best prepared athletes.

The Olympics, European championships, World Cup and International Student Games have been the sieve and the evidence of our rise. The blue shirt has become, in all fields, a symbol of ability...of ardour, of assertion.

The number of individual successes blend into the bright dazzling size of the collective success, and abroad our superiority is recognised, admired and envied.

Undoubtedly international sporting successes enabled the regime to make claims about the merits and achievements of Fascist rule to both international and domestic audiences, and clearly there was significant national progress in this field. Nonetheless, this is not necessarily to suggest that such achievements always resulted in a society united around the national Fascist identity, as promoted by the regime through sport. In reality, Fascism’s idealised identity contained and exposed many contradictions and inconsistencies that had the potential to undermine its message.

Despite the *Italiano nuovo’s* portrayal as a heroic combatant fighting in the name of the regime, *calcio* drew much of its inspiration and many of its best international players from outside of Italy, thereby slightly undermining any nationalist pride in these ‘pure’ Italian players. Yet this also indicates the key non-biological characteristic necessary to qualify as a member of the nation. As Falasca-Zamponi has noted:

> total obedience and faith in the regime were fundamental requirements for membership in the community. Passive acceptance of Mussolini’s rule did not suffice for one to be considered a loyal fascist. Participation was a duty and dictated the inclusion and exclusion of the true believers.

While some questions were raised about the presence of *oriundi* in the national team, their commitment to the cause was of more importance than any question marks over their nationality and Italian bloodline. In return for its investment in the physical education and preparation of the masses, plus its huge commitment to developing a national sporting infrastructure, the regime demanded the utmost loyalty from participants in sport at every level. It reflected the nature of Italian Fascist society up until the Ethiopia campaign in 1935 and the introduction of racial laws in 1938, whereby total commitment to the regime was the fundamental factor for an individual to be considered a member of the national community.

Yet, if commitment was the keyword in the Italian Fascist identity, it left room for manoeuvre among the finer small print, which was particularly visible in the general field of culture where considerable individuality was permitted within the broad parameters of Fascism. The national stadium-building programme demonstrated this, the stark difference between the Littoriale in Bologna and the Giovanni Berta in Florence revealing the scope for
individual expression within the field of art and architecture. Unable to formulate any definitive guidelines as to what exactly constituted Fascist art, these stadia were huge examples of how the regime sought to include rather than exclude its cultural exponents and practitioners. As seen, the products of this cultural flexibility, particularly in the field of architecture, varied between modernist and more traditional neo-Roman styles. Besides enabling such apparently contradictory forms to peaceably coexist, this flexibility also facilitated the regime’s construction of buildings that contributed to the formation and establishment of a Fascist identity and invented tradition that could bind the nation together. In this way, the Giovanni Berta stadium and the Santa Maria Novella station in Florence symbolised the modernisation of Italian cities throughout the peninsula, while the Littoriale developed Fascism’s Imperial roots and the myth of Rome.

Although, in the mid-1970s, a number of historians took ‘the line that there can, a priori, be no connection between fascism and culture’, more recent research has revealed how the regime actually embraced it, the dramatically contrasting stadia in Bologna and Florence perfectly illustrating this. In fact, calcio and the stadia further support Cavazza’s argument that the regime used regional culture as a moderate-conservative form of national education. This clearly applies to the presented case studies of Bologna and Florence, where the respective city teams and their stadia were employed to present, sustain and develop myths around the physical and spiritual rebirth of the nation. Such examples of cultural flexibility and openness ensured broader mass public appeal as much as it avoided alienation. It also raised question marks as to what extent such loosely defined cultural forms could realistically be called Fascist, thereby undermining the regime’s attempt to invent a sense of tradition and shared experience.

Irrespective of the system of government, football thrives upon strong associations and affinities to town, city and national representative teams. They are not mutually exclusive and it is, of course, possible to support both with equal degrees of passion. However, under Fascism an intense support for the local side, even if combined with equally strong sentiments for the national team, increasingly undermined the regime’s organic view of the nation. For Fascism, the unfortunate and often uncontrollable result of calcio’s national development and politicisation, which it hoped would act as a societal bonding

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3 Falasca-Zamponi, Fascist Spectacles, p.190.
agent, was the creation of strong, local, city-based identities that demanded teams, and occasionally encouraged fans, to do battle across the peninsula.

In Bologna, it appears that Arpinati’s motives for building the stadium and supporting the club as much as possible were stimulated by his desire to restore the city’s former glory, which the Fascists suggested had been tarnished by Liberal Italy. However, while the team required a stadium worthy of its status, the Littoriale’s excessive size was indicative of his international ambitions. These were also reflected in his encouragement of the commune’s financial support for the club, which it was hoped would ensure it remained competitive in the emerging transfer market and, thus, national and international competition. The net result of this strategy was the intensification of campanilismo, which was exactly what the regime had been trying to avoid. However, if local fans were identifying strongly with the club, its Coppa Europa campaigns revealed another side to Bologna FC’s identity, as foreign supporters and political campaigners chose to attack what they saw as a symbol of Fascism.

The comparison of Bologna with Fiorentina shows how campanilismo was not just stimulated by success in calcio. In the case of Fiorentina, the radical local party chose to put the city on the national calcio map by merging two smaller clubs into one, around which the city population could unite to help the team reach the national league. However, given the club’s relative lack of success, it was the Giovanni Berta stadium that best illustrated the city’s independent spirit and thought. Although its revolutionary design symbolised the radical rebirth of Florence under its avant-garde Fascist leadership, the internationally acclaimed stadium did not cross the regime’s bounds of architectural acceptability. It was another indication of the many potential paths to Fascism that were open to the localities, without threatening or undermining the regime’s national organic vision.

Such radical buildings can therefore be seen to have been an acceptable form of identity politics for the regime, which were able to adequately represent the strength of local pride. Once more, this concurs neatly with Cavazza’s investigation into the revival of folk traditions and festivals in which he argues that the recourse to a local ideology seems to have been greatest where men from the old Fascist elite were strongest; like Tuscany or Friuli.5

Such architectural diversity illustrated the type of dilemmas and contradictions that calcio provoked and the regime was unable to resolve. It is tempting to view the many irreconcilable differences mentioned throughout this thesis as a failure of the regime’s attempt to create a shared sense of identity through calcio, but even if true, this cannot
undermine Fascism's undoubted efforts in this field. Of course, assessing the extent to which people believed in Fascism and consented to the regime through football is an almost impossible task, as participation in whatever form of the game, be it as a spectator or player, cannot necessarily be read as a sign of consensus or support.

While this thesis has concentrated upon demonstrating how the regime attempted to mobilise mass support and project its identity upon the nation through football, some conclusions as to its effectiveness can also be drawn. Irrespective of Fascism's success in this field, the mere fact that it deliberately chose this cultural format indicates its awareness of sport as arguably the most widespread cultural activity in society, and certainly one in which its involvement was unlikely to experience too much resistance.

Yet, this is not to say that football supporters formed a simplistic, easily manipulated amorphous mass. As Falasca-Zamponi has argued:

One needs to contextualise the popular reception of fascism by looking specifically at the way the regime conceived its audience and the implications of the perception on the audience's response. We cannot think of a "public" as an already established entity, an objectified unchanging reality, nor a spontaneous outgrowth. Audiences are a social construction, the product of social processes that situate them within a discursive space characterized by distinctive power relations.\(^5\)

Thus, if the regime's exploitation of calcio is to be considered a failure in any way, it would have to be on the basis that people cannot merely be considered passive objects, as they are subjects capable of autonomous thought and judgement. Yet even this reality did not necessarily deter the regime. Le Bon's theory of crowds suggested that the mass collective mind was open to manipulation and suggestion.

Domestically, there is little recorded sense of opposition having been expressed through calcio, and while external anti-Fascist forces did organise collective action against travelling teams, it is impossible to suggest this might have undermined support for the regime. In fact, it may even have indirectly achieved the opposite as fans took offence at attacks upon their local representatives. Nonetheless, the violent, campanilismo inspired activities that threatened the concept of the nation required close surveillance, threats, and acts of repression, if order was to be maintained.

Despite this development, such local sentiments cannot realistically be suggested to have been politically motivated by opposition to the regime. In fact, as in the cases of Bologna and Florence, one could argue they were stimulated by an appreciation of the work of the respective local party in financing and constructing clubs and stadia that citizens could

\(^5\) Cavazza, _Piccole Patrie_, p.246.
\(^6\) Falasca-Zamponi, _Fascist Spectacles_, p.189.
be proud of. Throughout Italy, the expression of local identity through calcio varied considerably from area to area, and although these were occasionally strong enough to undermine the idealised image of the Fascist nation, one cannot suggest that they represented politically motivated opposition to the regime. Again, it would be unwise to portray this as Fascism's failure to impose its identity upon the masses, for permitting the existence of individual expressions of local identity may have acted as a necessary safety valve that averted the need for stronger acts of repression. Whether or not the regime succeeded in mobilising mass support, its takeover and manipulation of calcio was a deliberate attempt to establish subservience and consensus among society.

An investigation beyond the period of this study and the rule of the Fascist regime would further develop this assessment of the long-term extent to which the regime's politicisation of calcio impacted upon the game's identity. A superficial assessment of this period shows how many of the game's structures and leading figures remained in place, while the stadia were divested of their Fascist names, imagery and iconography. Many of the old issues that the regime had attempted to tackle, such as regionalism, the role of foreign players, the organisational structure and the importance of the national team, quickly resurfaced. This contributed to a general sense of bankruptcy within the game and the FIGC, which demanded further, radical restructuring by the late 1940s. Although it is impossible to state categorically from the research undertaken here, many of the structures established by the regime still endured even beyond these post-war changes, which could either suggest the depth or the superficiality of the regime's imposed identity.

In many respects the degree to which Fascist policy towards sport and calcio succeeded in mobilising the masses and contributed to the long-term survival of the regime, can only be hypothetical. No sporting success was able to keep the social, economic and political realities of life under the regime at bay forever, but calcio was unquestionably at least a diversion from the harsh realities of Fascist Italy. However, even if the game's successes were unable to mobilise society on a mass, long-term basis, the projected image of life under Fascism was often as powerful as the reality itself.

On the eve of the 1934 World Cup, Mussolini turned his thoughts to the educational and recreational organisations and facilities that the regime had created, which had not only sharpened the muscles and minds of the Italian population but had also won it the right to host the tournament. Leaving the final word to Lo Sport Fascista and Mussolini should not be interpreted as an apology for the regime's intervention in calcio and the leisure-time of the
masses, as this thesis is primarily concerned with the image and identity that Fascism wished to create through the game, be this real or imaginary. Nonetheless, the individual best placed to effectively summarise all that the regime hoped to achieve through its politicisation of sport and calcio, was Mussolini; even if his statement belies reality and truth:

"Fascism did what the old liberalism and the same democracy had always overlooked: it took itself to the people, it went among the peasants, the workers, the farmers, the middle classes, it approached students, the young, it interpreted the needs of the people, it educated them politically and morally, it did not only organise them from the professional and economic point of view but also from the military, cultural, educational and recreational perspective."

[32 Stati (ma saranno anche di più...) in lotta pei Campionati Mondiali di calcio', Lo Sport Fascista, 12, 1933, p. 20.]

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APPENDIX
Fig 1. Italian national football team shirt, circa 1928.
(Note *Fasces* added to CONI's Sabaudo Shield)

Fig 2. Italian Football Team Uniform, circa 1932.
Fig 3. The Stadio dei Marmi (Marble Stadium) - Rome.

Fig 4. The mythologised 'Italiano Nuovo', Stadio dei Marmi.

Fig 5. Various statues, Stadio dei Marmi. (Note CONI building in background)
Fig 6. 21st Century *Bolognesi* at play in Arpinati’s Littoriale complex. Outdoor Pool (front), Stadium (left), Indoor Pool/ Gymnasium (back). Note the Portico San Luca in the distance.

Fig 7. Melting into the foreground. The Littoriale’s Marathon Tower from Portico San Luca – Bologna.
Fig 8. The Roman/medieval Torre di Maratona and Portico San Luca.

Fig 9. Monolithic Fascist grandeur. The Marathon Tower (external view).
Fig 10. Internal view of the Marathon Tower on a matchday, circa 1928. Note the statue of the Duce on horseback.

Fig 12. Giovanni Berta stadium, Florence. Nervi’s covered Tribuna d’Onore.

Fig 13. Nervi’s revolutionary roof keeps the dignitaries dry.
Fig 14. Giuntoli’s less acclaimed entrance for the renamed Giovanni Berta.

Fig 15. Roman, modernist, or Fascist?
Fig 16. Nervi’s Revolutionary Helicoid Stairway (Curva Fiesole).

Fig 17. Helicoid Stairway (Tribuna Maratona. Note base of Marathon Tower).
Fig 18. Nervi's Marathon Tower in all its modernist glory.

Fig 19. A modernist monolith. The masses view of the arengario.
Fig 20. Curva Marione (Ferrovia).

Fig 21. Underneath the arches. Tribuna Maratona-style.

Fig 22. More of the 'Giovanni Berta's' 'chaste nudity'.

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Fig 23. Tickets for Germany v Belgium, and Italy v Spain, World Cup 1934, Florence.

Fig 24. The controversial 1934 World Cup stamps.
Fig 25. The Coppa del Duce.
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