

Review Paper

**NEWSPAPER REPRESENTATIONS OF SOCCER
IN THE SLOVENIAN NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION**

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Abstract. *A study of the newspaper representations of soccer in Slovenia reveals a history of oppositions and struggle and shows the effects of media workers and their reports on the public acceptance of soccer. Throughout the century, soccer has functioned as a site of constant negotiations between the attractiveness of the game and the moral values attributed to it. The hegemonic nationalist discourse that accompanied the rise of soccer in Slovenia, which is obviously traceable in the newspaper accounts from different periods, denied its potential to work for the national cause and branded it as a foreign, health hazardous, harmful, violent and immoral sport. This study analyses the representations of soccer in the biggest 20th-century Slovenian quality and sport newspapers and includes only one part of the analyzed data that adequately show the prevailing newspaper discourses on soccer throughout the century and explain its contemporary social position.*

Key words: *soccer, newspaper media, historiography, nationalism, morality*

INTRODUCTION

We placed the research presented in this paper in a specific theoretical framework. First, we acknowledged our reservations towards the term *national identity* because it has become a kind of indefinable popular cliché in social sciences. National identity is a vague, elastic and fuzzy term and a product of stereotyping, be it autotypification or heterotypification (Blain, Boyle, & O'Donnell, 1993). It is never fixed, although the members of a certain national community see it as such and especially feel it at sporting victories that confirm what Maguire and Poulton (1999, 18) poetically described as a fantasy shield of a peoples' imagined community. Bruno Latour once asked the question: where were microbes before Pasteur (1999, 172-173) and a similar question should be asked

about the thing that people call national identity. So, where was national identity before it became such an important non-human actor in our social relations? The answer is that before it was used in speech, there was no national identity, but once it started being used, it materialized in front of peoples' eyes and seemed as if it has been there all along, permanent and clearly defined. Therefore, the term *national identity* will be replaced by the term *national identification* as a never ending process, full of dramatic turns, contingencies and irrational actions that position us in a certain place in a society at a certain time.

Second, the research was aimed at gaining an insight into the dynamics of Slovenian national identification through newspaper media texts on soccer. This type of media text was chosen because it is almost permanent. Radio and TV texts just pass us by very quickly and we cannot get them back, except if we record them. But newspaper texts can be archived, sorted and used as a source of radio and TV media texts. And media workers do use them. In this way, they function as sites of memory (and, therefore, as sites of knowledge) or *lieux de mémoire* as Pierre Nora (1996) defined this phenomena. Media workers are, in this sense, important actors in the struggle for truth and an understanding of our social reality. After all, like every society in history, our society also has its own regime of truth, its own politics of truth and also those who are charged with saying what counts as truth (Foucault, 2000, 131). However, although media workers are granted this status, the status of people who are charged with saying what counts as truth, it should be acknowledged that they are not the creators of knowledge even if they are the authors of the texts.

This is linked to the third theoretical point that defines the position of the author. The author should not be understood in terms of a person who delivered a speech or wrote a text. Instead, an author should be understood as "the unifying principle in a particular group of writings or statements, lying at the origins of their significance, at the seat of their coherence" (Foucault, 1982, 221). Journalists and other media workers are not the creators of knowledge. They are not the ones who invent things. The best description of their function would be to say that they function as conductors. They take an idea and sell it on. They observe what is going on, go out or search the news agency databases to get the necessary information and then disseminate it through various information channels. They talk to people and put their private conversations into public speech. In this sense, it is fair to say that, although soccer has been a constant presence on the national field and also broadcasted and written about in a similar tone, it was not sport media workers who single-handedly turned it into a game of national prestige. Mediated soccer is still merely entertainment and no matter how seriously we take the work of the media workers, they are primarily entertainers and thus probably feel obliged to tell the people what they like to hear. People like to have their beliefs and ideas confirmed, while the responsibility of the media worker is merely to present the information in an appropriate shape. In this view, the media accounts of soccer in Slovenia paint a pretty convincing picture of soccer, the position of soccer in people's everyday lives and in their identification practices. Those practices, nevertheless, always follow some dynamics and if they are played in the field of soccer, they follow the dynamics of successes and defeats and respond to them. The following and rather unconventional historiographic trip of newspaper media coverage of soccer in Slovenia will present a story of nationalist oppositions and struggles and a story of a negative coverage that has to a large extent been positioning soccer, or the imaginary virtues of soccer, on the ladder of social values.

The presented timeline should, nevertheless, not be understood as a linear and progressive history of the past, but as a fragmented, contingent and unstable history of the present (compare Foucault, 1995, 31).

The origin: First, there was a ball

We abandoned 'croquet' and started watching. What is it made of? It is not iron. Inflated leather? It can't be. 'There is a soul inside' somebody noted. It is like a human: soul and body! We came closer and slowly we started taking part in it. We soon learned how to play with this miraculous ball. (Rudolf Kropivnik's memory of the first encounter with soccer; published in the sport newspaper Slovenski sport, in Kropivnik, 1926, 15)

The story of the origin of soccer is the departure point of the official histories of soccer in Slovenia. Although it is generally acknowledged that England was the birthplace of modern soccer, this fact remains rather insignificant in the Slovenian historiographic and media accounts on the origin of the game. The arrival of the game in Slovenia is, as it usually is in the stories of origin, unclear and mysterious, leaving a lot of space for myths. One of the stories of origin says that the first soccer ball was brought to Slovenia from Prague by Stanko Bloudek (compare Stepišnik, 1971; Nogometna zveza Slovenije, 2006),¹ who is today considered to be one of the founding fathers of Slovenian sport and that soccer was brought to Slovenia by the Slovenian students who studied in Prague. However, there are also other stories of the beginning, such as the one that proves with a clip from a newspaper article that people were already playing soccer in Slovenia in 1903 (Nogometni klub Lendava, 2006), predominantly a Hungarian team in Lendava, or the one claiming that soccer was played in some [German] secondary schools around 1900 (Nogometna zveza Slovenije, 2006). The problematic issue with the last two stories is a lack of a 'Slovenian actor', because the main propagating actors are Germans or Hungarians. The first myth of origin is therefore the most appealing, but it speaks more about our present than our past. It says that after 15 years of independence and after almost a century after the Austro-Hungarian Empire ceased to exist, Slovenians are still deeply and intensely involved in inventing traditions and in rewriting of their history.

The evolution: A club

We were watching and laughing. Are these really soccer players? This must be a joke. Men over twenty, some over thirty, with beards, moustaches, glasses, men who are already married. Is this our competition? And what a game! They kick the dirt more often than they kick the ball. For us, artists who already knew how to play 'oxford', it was all too much a layman performance. (Rudolf Kropivnik's memory of the first soccer match between Hermes and Ilirija; published in the sport newspaper Slovenski sport, in Kropivnik, 1926, 16)

¹ Stanko Bloudek (1890-1959) is nowadays considered to be one of the pioneers of sport in Slovenia. He was an industrious inventor who constructed airplanes, cars, ski-jump hills, etc., but he was also a generous supporter of the Ilirija sport club. He was one of the leading figures in the club and in 1948 became also a member of the International Olympic Committee. Historiographic accounts on Bloudek's involvement in sport are mythified, although sport was not his central occupation in life. Despite that, the highest Slovenian award in sport is named after him although it would be perhaps more appropriate to put his name on the highest award in engineering.

At the beginning, adults ignored the new game, except for school principals who found it extremely non-educational and inappropriate (compare Kropivnik, 1926, 16) and the authorities that found the matches between the Slovenian Hermes soccer club and the German Ljubljana soccer clubs politically problematic (compare Stepišnik, 1971, 33). The first Slovenian soccer club *Hermes* was founded in 1907 by sophomore high school boys and not by adult men. However, after the adult German-speaking men of Ljubljana founded their own soccer club, the adult Slovenian men also founded their own club *Ilirija* in response. It was a matter of national pride. The idea of a Slovenian nation was at that time already pretty much shaped, imagined and exploited by the adults – thanks to Slovenian newspapers who were living on the nationalist feelings and producing the national Slovenian market. The production and fueling of the Slovenian reading market were based on the presumption of Germanization that endangered the existence of Slovenianness. But the Slovenian men, who founded the *Ilirija* soccer club, had one problem – they did not know how to play the game. When they played the first match against the boys of *Hermes* in 1912, they lost 18:0 and they soon realized that it would be a national humiliation if they played the German club with their skills. Therefore, they started inviting the boys from the *Hermes* to play for them and in 1913, the two clubs merged. There was, however, a constant dispute between the boys and the men of *Ilirija*, because the young ones played for the sake of the game and the older ones for the sake of the nation. The other reason why soccer failed to play the role of a sport that could represent a point for national identification to the Slovenian people was the isolation of the pre-WWI Slovenian clubs who played mostly among themselves, some Croatian clubs and at one time also *Slavija* from Prague. *Ilirija* lost that match against *Slavija* 10:0 but the Slovenian newspapers depicted this match as proof of the Slavic mastery over soccer that Slovenians still had to learn (Kropivnik, 1926, 15).

The opposition: A sporting rivalry

Sokol should not mediate on behalf of sports that accelerate too unilateral a development of the body, such as bicycling and soccer. These two sports are not appropriate for national physical education and should not be included in Sokol's working program (The announcement of the Sokol elders on the unfavourability of soccer, in Gangl, Fux, & Ambrožič, 1919, 12).

The Slovenian Sokol gymnastic movement was one of the greatest obstacles for the development of soccer in Slovenia. When soccer was introduced in Slovenia, it triggered a process of moral panic (compare Cohen, 2002) which branded soccer as an unhealthy, risky, savage sport that was in contradiction with the high moral standards of the then prevailing ideas of physical education that were propagated by the Sokols. Providing that the Sokol movement was very influential and became the basis of physical education in schools in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after WWI, soccer was in an unfavorable position. It was considered damaging to physical health, and represented a danger to moral health. The latter conviction was strengthened with the introduction of professional players. Suddenly, the quest for money overshadowed the nation, and this presented a serious threat to the Sokol idea of the moral purity of sport and its national value. On the other hand, the Sokol elders in Slovenia feared that young gymnasts would find soccer more attractive than gymnastics and would abandon their practice in the Sokol gyms.

Professionalism: The question of morality

We have already pointed out the unhealthy conditions that rule over our athletes. The concealed professionalism that kills sport and everything around it has penetrated the lines of our soccer players. The athletes that demand money for every step they make are becoming conceited. Professionalism and conceitedness kill every sport, even the ideal and serious ones (The critique of professionalism; published in the Slovenec newspaper, in "Krizna," 1936. 16).

Burdensome financial demands imposed by the soccer sections in Slovenian sport threatened the clubs with financial instability and even extinction. Soccer sections were the strongest among Slovenian sport clubs between both wars, but with growing professionalism, soccer became too expensive. Sport clubs were forced to borrow money. The largest Slovenian sport association, Ilirija, had eight sections in the period from 1911 to 1936; seven of them were on the verge of extinction because all the money was allocated to the soccer section. In addition, the quality of soccer was poor in comparison with soccer in other parts of Yugoslavia. Insults such as pride, greed, lack of discipline, idleness and boastfulness were usually aimed at soccer, and have always been perceived as foreign to the Slovenian "national character". Soccer could not be ignored because it was too widespread, but it was perceived as a foreign invader – as a hybrid between physical activity and non-Slovenian moral features that had been imported along with it. Although the idea that Serbs and Croats were morally more corrupt than Slovenians was not explicitly expressed in the media, soccer presented an appropriate scapegoat. The non-Slovenian moral features of soccer were attributed to the "morally inferior" Serbian and Croatian influence. Given its popularity that led to professionalisation in other parts of Yugoslavia, soccer was perceived as a vehicle of Serbian and Croatian immorality and a vehicle which brought immoral features to the Slovenian people. Yugoslav state building discourse disabled all direct nationalist outbursts but people's morality was out of its domain. Soccer was therefore branded as a Balkan sport and this label sticks to this day.

Aggressiveness: Soccer as a Balkan sport

XXVI Assault Division: XI Motor Brigade – the match was typically southerner-like and at times even overtly warlike (The description of one of the first soccer matches immediately after the war; published in the sport newspaper Polet, in "Kronika," 1945, 2).

Soccer in Slovenia was on the path of becoming the exclusive sport of the Balkan southerners. The lack of success of Slovenian soccer clubs and soccer players readily confirmed this belief. In addition, there was much talk about dubious financial business going on in – mostly non-Slovenian – soccer that made the game morally questionable. This belief was very strong and can be traced in all the Slovenian newspapers during the entire post-WWII period. From the end of WWII until the break-up of Yugoslavia, only Maribor and the Ljubljana Olimpija played in the premier Yugoslav league, if only for a few seasons. This meant that Slovenian soccer fans had no "glorious" soccer history to which they could attach their Slovenianness and a given sport can only serve as a nationally important actor if its achievements can give rise to the national pride of the audience. A short bright period for soccer opened in 1952 when Yugoslavia played the Soviet

Union at the Helsinki Olympics. It was one of the rare opportunities that enabled Slovenians to use soccer as an identification point with the wider Yugoslav community – thanks to the foreign danger in the shape of the Soviet Union (see "Jugoslavija Igra," 1952; "Jugoslavija Premagala," 1952; "Brzjavka Naših," 1952; "Veselje Po," 1952). However, the friendly environment was very short-lived and when the enthusiasm settled down, the public opinion returned to what it once was. Because of growing professionalism in soccer, which was in contradiction with the Socialist views toward sport, there was a move (advocated by some soccer officials, experts and journalists) to dissolve the second Yugoslav league, and force the clubs to compete only inside the leagues of the federal republics ("Več Doslednosti," 1952).

(In)compatibility: Soccer professionalism clashed with socialism

Soccer as sport is being perverted today, and the events on soccer fields also undermine its respectability. I often listen to sport commentators who introduce players, saying: 'The club paid one million dinars for this player. So-and-so's country is offering this much money for this or that player. We are wondering if he will change clubs.' Are these sport commentaries? Such commentaries belong to the market hall, not to the sports grounds. [...] I think that soccer players no longer have the right to be treated as amateurs (The critique of professionalism in soccer, written by the Olympic champion in gymnastics Miro Cerar; published in the Ljubljanski Dnevnik newspaper, in Cerar & Cerar, 1964, 17).

Although most of the players who played in the premier Yugoslav league were professionals, the Yugoslav Soccer Association did not officially acknowledge professionalism until the 1970s. Soccer was using up the greatest funds, much to the aggravation of the Slovenian journalists. Miro Cerar, one of the most popular athletes in Slovenia during the 1960s, put his popularity to profitable use by means of the daily Dnevnik that published his diaries and the diaries of his wife all year round. In one episode, they were writing about soccer; theirs was a view that can be said to have been shared by the broader Slovenian public. Professionalism was in contradiction with both the old Sokol view and with the then current Socialist view on sport. Both perceived it as morally inadmissible because professionals were engaged in sport only for their own profit and were not in the service of the nation. Soccer players were therefore perceived as a bunch of immoral, undereducated, ignorant and undisciplined individuals who were corrupted by soccer sporting officials and money. Strong media critique of the Yugoslav soccer players' professionalism at the time when they were officially still recognized as amateurs led to their exclusion from amateur sporting circles. The Yugoslav Soccer Association was forced to officially recognize them as professional players; the Yugoslav Olympic soccer team was therefore not allowed to participate at the 1968 Olympic Games with a team of professionals but with a team of the second-class amateur players. The commentary of Slovenian daily Dnevnik took the opportunity to rub the point in after the Yugoslav national team (the professional one), lost a match and ended it with physical violence: "Soccer is again the enemy of sport. If Yugoslavs follow the example of soccer, [...] we will be altogether banned from the Olympic Games" ("Nogomet Samo," 1968).

Shame: Growing nationalist oppositions

It is no accident that we are blushing because of our Olympic soccer players. We educated them in non-persistence, negligence, underestimation of their opponents, and in other vices that have no place in the big, self-sacrificing family of Olympians. (The critique of Yugoslav team at the 1980 Olympic tournament; published in the Ljubljanski Dnevnik newspaper; in Klipšteter, 1980, 9)

Until 2000, the emphasis that the media coverage put on soccer mostly had to do with the history of failures and scandalous events that were accompanying soccer. This trend was especially strong in the 1980s but it continued well into the 1990s. The poor performance of the Yugoslav team at the Moscow Olympics was a perfect opportunity to present once again the main attributes of soccer as foreign to the Slovenian character. When the Yugoslav national soccer team lost the match against the Australian team at the 1988 Olympic tournament, there were many headlines in the Slovenian newspapers that condemned their behavior and their bad performance. One of them even posed the question: "Did our soccer players sell out the match?" ("So Naši," 1988). Soccer was burdened with a bad reputation that was exploited whenever something went wrong, especially in the late 1980s when it became one of the signifiers of non-Slovenianness. The majority of cartoons about the 1988 Olympic Games that were published in the Slovenian daily Dnevnik mocked Yugoslav soccer. One example depicted a big kangaroo that carried in its pouch a small man wearing a distinctive Serbian hat and shouting: "Soccer, soccer, soccer..." (Novak, 1988a, 10). This cartoon reproduced the stereotype of Serbian soccer enthusiasm and combined it with Serbian nationalism that was at that time manifested at big public gatherings where Serbian hegemonic nationalist ideas were publicly expressed. The cartoon mocked the Yugoslav (Serbian) love of soccer that was put to shame when the exotic Australian team defeated them. The Serbian identity of the small man was emphasized by the text (soccer, soccer...), written in the Cyrillic alphabet that is used only by Serbs and Macedonians. Another cartoon depicted a Yugoslav soccer player on the winners podium accompanied by the words: "April 1st – April fools day" (Novak, 1988b, 12). The message was that the Yugoslavs had overestimated the abilities of their soccer players – there were no Slovenian players in the Yugoslav national team at that time – and that the Yugoslav team was not fit to play at major competitions, let alone to win an Olympic tournament, as they had said before the Games. The last cartoon had a drawing of a giant cracked eggshell that resembled a ball, and a tiny nestling walking away from it (Novak, 1988c, 13). This one read in two different ways, but neither was flattering for soccer. The first reading was that the Yugoslav soccer players were making big haughty promises, but were really like a tiny helpless nestling, as they had demonstrated that they cannot really play ball. But there was another possible meaning. The shape of Slovenia on the map resembles that of a hen; this resemblance was likewise used by many designers of the pro-Slovenian campaigns in the process leading to independence. Therefore the cartoon might also be read as if the giant cracked soccer egg with the sign YU (Yugoslavia) depicted the breaking-up of Yugoslavia, while the nestling walking away from it depicted Slovenia. In that reading, soccer was posed as a symbol of the disintegrating non-Slovenian Yugoslavia.

Rehabilitation: Re-thinking soccer

Everything kicks, everything cheers: Slovenia is learning that soccer is not a corrupt Balkan thing but an instrument of universal prestige (An attempt for the rehabilitation of soccer in Slovenia; published in the Delo newspaper, in Božič, 1991, 25).

Once Slovenia had gained its independence, some soccer enthusiasts tried to improve the public image of soccer. At the end of 1991, Franci Božič published an article in the prestigious Saturday Supplement of the daily *Delo*. The title was: "Everything kicks, everything cheers: Slovenia is learning that soccer is not a corrupt Balkan thing but an instrument of universal prestige" (Božič, 1991, 25). Božič defended soccer, but at the same time inferred that only a small number of spectators really attended the matches of the Slovenian first league, and that the seats were half empty. However, he was able to assign guilt to the very same popular scapegoat that was at that time accused of nearly anything undesirable: the fifty years of Communism:

Almost everybody credits the first Slovenian national league for the soccer bonanza, but actually, it is only a return to the old, universal values that have been, for several decades (un)successfully hindered by Communism; soccer and its magical powers of attracting the masses was simply too dangerous. Just before the summer, a handful of Slovenian clubs still participated in Yugo-competitions² and they were indisputably better [than the ones taking place now]. [...] But the 'Yugo' scene in Slovenia just didn't 'pan out' and soccer enthusiasm simply watered down in the last few years (1991, 25).

Remembering to forget: The first international successes

In these difficult times, you united our people with your comradeship and morality (Slovenian president Milan Kučan greeting the team upon their return from the European Championship, published in the Dnevnik newspaper, in B. M., 2000, 33).

The status of Soccer started to improve only after the Slovenian national team surprisingly qualified for the Euro 2000 and the World Soccer Championship in 2002. If its non-successes were previously remembered and emphasized, they were now conveniently forgotten. In the course of my research I came across a tiny, funny brochure that looked a bit ridiculous at first, but later proved to be a good example of how knowledge and memory are produced and managed. The brochure was an advertisement for canned condiments but, in fact was about soccer. It was full of images of Slovenian and international soccer players, and information about the 2002 World Championship: various teams, the schedule of TV broadcasts of the matches, charts for keeping scores, etc. It was designed as a viewer's manual for the World Soccer Championship. But what astonished me most was the presentation of the history of Slovenian soccer; namely, the whole Yugoslav era was simply nonexistent. What was offered was the information that the Slovenian soccer team had played its first and only match before WWII in 1920 against France, and lost 0:5 (Papi, 2002, 4). This created an impression that Slovenia had

² Slovenia declared independence on 25 June 1991.

already had its own national soccer team in 1920. Furthermore, the history of Slovenian soccer was presented in five sentences that never mentioned Yugoslavia:

[...] did you know that the first Slovenian soccer club was a student club named Hermes (1910) and that the first 'real' soccer club was SK Ilirija (founded on 10 May 1911) [...], that students won the first match between Hermes and Ilirija with a score of 18:0 [...], that the first soccer ball was brought to Ljubljana by Stanko Bloudek in 1909, and that he played for Ilirija for a while [...], that ASK Primorje, the Slovenian champion in the years 1928 and 1929, was a Ljubljana-based team established by the people from the Primorska region and that after WWI the club came to Ljubljana from the territory previously occupied by Italy [...], that [the club] Slovan, founded in 1913, is the only Slovenian soccer club that has preserved its original name to this day (Papi, 2002, 6).

This history was carefully selected to conceal anything that could link soccer to Yugoslavia. The period after WWII that was especially "problematic" from that point of view was left out entirely; a gap half a century long was ignored and the course of history was resumed with the most important dates in Slovenian soccer that began not in 1910, 1919, or 1945, but in 1992 with "the first official international match of the Slovenian A team" (Papi, 2002, 5). As soon as Slovenian soccer gained nation-wide respect, it acquired its nationalist ceremonial features. When it became clear that the Slovenian soccer team would play at the European Championship, the supporters of the rival Slovenian soccer clubs saw no problem uniting into the Association of Slovenian Supporters. Describing soccer and its supporters – previously mostly referred to as hooligans – the Slovenian media began to use the language of admiration instead of the old language of disdain. The iconography that developed in this process of nationalization was based on national symbols. The jerseys of the Slovenian team were green with a white zigzag on the chest, symbolizing the Triglav, Slovenia's highest mountain; certainly one of the sacred places of Slovenianness. Green became the color of the united supporters who were much admired by foreign media for their sporting behavior at the European Championship matches; the Slovenian media previously constantly emphasized their Balkan-like behavior. Suddenly, soccer players with non-Slovenian surnames became fully integrated members of the Slovenian national community. The perception of the immoral character of soccer was about to change drastically. Interestingly, the formula for turning soccer into a Slovenian game was given by one of the most famous trainers of the Yugoslav national soccer team, Vujadin Boškov, who identified the features that made Slovenian soccer so special and different from the Serbian one: "Slovenians are special people. You know, they live in a mountainous country and are used to hard work. And besides, they are extremely well disciplined" (Bergant, 2000, 52). This was then the winning formula: hard work and discipline. These two "unique Slovenian national characteristics" were the foundation of the new nationalist image of soccer and were constantly reproduced and disseminated by the Slovenian media.

The new symbol: An impression of national sport

This is our starting point at the Euro for Slovenia against Yugoslavia: when it comes to skill, Slovenia is weaker; when it comes to morale, stronger. [...] Usually, the mo-

rale of the team is the decisive factor, given that the two teams are not too technically discrepant. This is the thesis that predicts success to the Slovenian premiere at the Euro and was best proven after the Falkland war by the famous Argentinean trainer and a former world champion Cesar Luis Menotti who experienced a debacle at the 1982 World Championship in Spain: 'No team is so good that they could win the match after the war was lost' (The commentaries before the match between Slovenia and Yugoslavia; published in the Delo newspaper, in Božič, 2000, 12).

These unique "national" qualities of Slovenian soccer were of course constructed in relation to the Other – the Yugoslav team. By coincidence, the first match of the Slovenian team at Euro 2000 was against the Yugoslav team. The match was burdened with nationalist symbolism: two nations that used to live in the same state had split up in violence and were now facing each other on the soccer field. Yugoslavs had a great soccer tradition while Slovenians had none. The Slovenian media constantly portrayed this match as the combat between David and Goliath. The Yugoslavs were portrayed as a team of technically superior individuals while the Slovenians were praised as the more disciplined team. The Slovenians were perceived as morally stronger in an obvious insinuation to the outcome of the Slovenian war for independence with Yugoslavia in which the Yugoslav army was defeated. The match ended in a draw of 3:3 after the Slovenian team was already leading 3:0. For the Slovenian audience, this was the match of the Euro 2000, and the result was accepted as a victory – a moral one, of course. The language of discipline and moral virtue accompanied almost every report from the Euro 2000. The Slovenian selector, Srečko Katanec, who was at that time worshipped as a national hero, was constantly reminding people of the moral uniqueness of Slovenian soccer. When the Slovenian team lost the next match against the Spanish team, he admitted: "We are not corrupted enough just yet. I mean in a sporting sense. If we had stopped Mendieta with a foul, and we had three opportunities to do that, the second goal would probably not have happened" ("Rekli So," 2000). A sporting defeat was turned into a moral victory. Slovenian soccer was presented as the only soccer in the world that prefers fair-play over victory. The next match, against the Norwegian team, again ended in a draw, and the Slovenian team was out of the competition. But upon their return to Slovenia, they were welcomed as winners: nobody had expected them to win, but to behave and play in the noble (Slovenian) spirit. After such a successful performance at the Euro 2000, soccer became the most popular sport in Slovenia and some believed that it had finally replaced skiing as the national sport. A caricature in *Delo*, entitled "The Soccer Nation" for example depicted a man dressed in a threadbare Slovenian national garb, throwing his skis away as he is pursuing a soccer ball, exclaiming: "Oh, man, this is sport!" (Kočevar, 2000, 1). Enthusiasm grew in leaps and bounds when the same team qualified for the World Championship in 2002.

Slovenisation tool: Non-hybridity, national purity and assimilation

The success of the soccer team is not only proof that people who are not Slovenians by their ethnic origin can fight for the colors of their Slovenian homeland in a way that all the rest of us can only learn from: it is also a warning that they are doing so with the help of the values that were rejected by a portion of Slovenian men and women. This, of course, proves that Slovenian society is open enough to enable the

integration of the people who are not Slovenians by their ethnic origin – and that there are universal values in this society that allow non-Slovenians – let's put it this way – to become more Slovenian than Slovenians (The commentary on soccer as a tool of Slovenisation after the Slovenian team qualified for the World Cup Finals 2002; published in the Delo newspaper, in Kovač, 2001, 5).

This description is important from multiple perspectives. First, the moral value of Slovenian soccer was equated with the Slovenian "national character": modesty, discipline and hard work. These same values were previously attributed to skiing, as for example in a comment of Nataša Bokal's slalom victory in 1991:

It would not be an exaggeration if we imitated the Italian newspapers and wrote 'Nataša nazionale'. In so many ways, she is a pure reflection of the image that we Slovenians have about ourselves. She is hardworking, busy as a bee, and pedantic [...] but at the same time very modest and cautious (Šauta, 1991, 19).

This indicated that soccer was now morally virtuous enough to become the Slovenian national sport. Second, Slovenian soccer was now perceived as pure and non-hybrid and totally unrelated to Balkan soccer – members of the Slovenian national team were hardworking and disciplined, and, unlike the wild Balkanians who improvised and showed off all the time, responsibly obeyed their coach's rules. Thirdly and most interestingly, soccer was perceived as a tool that can turn people who were non-Slovenians by their ethnic origin into Slovenians, and a tool that can convert bad Slovenians that have rejected their national values back into good Slovenians. All this was praised as a noble, democratic project, but was far from the truth. Namely, soccer was not presented as a tool to sustain ethnic differences and acknowledge the hybridity of the Slovenian nation which today includes people of various provenances, but as an instrument whereby non-Slovenians can be acculturated, assimilated and homogenized into true Slovenians. In 2000, Slovenian soccer was obviously still perceived as a hybrid that could potentially establish a symbiotic relationship between ethnically heterogeneous Slovenian citizens; in 2002, however, it was turned into a pure Slovenian sport that has the power to convert individuals into Slovenians. The Slovenian media of course played an important role in the dissemination of such ideas and have, unfortunately, completely failed to accept hybridity as a valid national option.

A hard landing: Old vices – again

We will now witness the painful process of 'dis-identification': the public feels betrayed and calls for revenge, a lot of pleasure can be extracted from the humiliation of yesterday's idols (The commentary on soccer performance and the dispute between the Slovenian star player Zlatko Zahovič and the Slovenian selector Srečko Katanec at the World Cup Finals 2002; published in the Dnevnik newspaper, in Šetinc, 2002, 5).

The Slovenian "soccer fairytale" took another surprising turn that degraded soccer once again. Already in 2000, Igor Bergant predicted that things will not go smoothly: "The toughest times will come later – after Euro 2000 is over, and after the achieved reputation and stereotypes have been confirmed. But not on the soccer field..." (2000, 52). In the year 2000, the Slovenian soccer team returned from Euro 2000 morally

victorious; but their return from the World Championship 2002 was morally disastrous. The reason was not their inadequate performance but the disputes inside the team. During and after the match between the Slovenian and the Spanish teams, the Slovenian selector Srečko Katanec and the star member of the Slovenian team, Zlatko Zahovič, engaged in a violent dispute. The matter was not settled in the locker room but went to the media. The dispute divided the Slovenian public into two sides: the majority supported Katanec and his decision to send Zahovič home, while some believed that this was not the appropriate course of action. Both Katanec and Zahovič gave very emotional statements to the media (see Okorn, 2002, 33). Zahovič's outbursts brought the tensions that existed between supporters of the clubs from different Slovenian regions into the national team. He was thus marked as the destroyer of Slovenian unity and discipline. The reactions to the selector's emotional speech in Slovenia were strong. It was discussed by experts in media shows, newspapers, television and radio channels organized public voting, internet forums blossomed, and even the Slovenian President intervened and called upon the President of the Soccer Association of Slovenia to clarify the matter. The majority of the Slovenian public took Katanec's side,³ while Zahovič was accused of disobedience, undisciplined comportment and arrogance – all the features that used to characterize soccer in the old days. The old opposition between Slovenianness and Balkanness in soccer was now established along the axis Katanec/Zahovič. Katanec symbolized Slovenian morality while Zahovič symbolized the 'dark', Balkan side.

In conclusion

Soccer in Slovenia functioned mostly as a norm of otherness and this perception also remained unchallenged in the times of the Socialist Yugoslavia. Although soccer was prospering in other Yugoslav republics, it remained far from the mediated sport mainstream in Slovenia. Throughout the whole socialist period only a fistful of Slovenian players and even fewer Slovenian clubs played in the first Yugoslav national league, which contributed to the perception of the Slovenian incapability to play soccer. Especially in the 1980s, with the growing nationalist tensions in Yugoslavia, soccer became a synonym of Balkanness as a direct opposition of Slovenianness. After Slovenia gained independence in 1991, there have been attempts to change this negative public perception of soccer, but they were unsuccessful until the Slovenian national team qualified for the Euro 2000. This event triggered the processes that could be described as the invention of tradition (compare Hobsbawm, 1993). Media workers started to rewrite Slovenian soccer history, inventing Slovenian soccer legends and turning Slovenian national team players with non-Slovenian surnames into the ideal representatives of Slovenianness. However, Slovenianness remained the norm and soccer was turned into a tool of Slovenisation. In this logic, any inappropriate behavior or foul play on the soccer field remained a sign of otherness, and the dispute between the Slovenian selector Katanec and star player Zahovič at the World Cup Finals in 2002, which was not based on nationalist grounds, was once more turned into a nationalist story in the media, which revived the old oppositions and prejudices against soccer.

³ Slovenian daily *Dnevnik*, for example, published the results of a public opinion poll in which people were asked who they thought was right. Almost half of the people interrogated replied that they supported Srečko Katanec, while only 6.7% backed Zlatko Zahovič. 18.5% claimed that they were both right, each in his own way, while the rest of them remained undecided ("Anketa," 2002).

All the examples show that soccer in combination with media broadcasting is a very influential national mobilization tool that can either bring people together or apart. This, however, is not inscribed in soccer. The game is just a game but the attributes that are ascribed to it are always political acts. Media workers carry a huge responsibility especially in the selection of news and in the angling of their texts. If we look at this from the perspective of sport itself, negative broadcasting can put back the development of a certain sport. Unfortunately, in the case of Slovenia, this happened to soccer, and it seems to be caught in a vicious circle of nationalism and morality. Slovenian citizens of non-Slovenian origin would have a much easier life if they could use soccer as a tool of integration and expression without abandoning their traditions. Things are improving, but mostly due to the quality of the work of soccer coaches with junior teams and not as much to the results of the national team. Actually, the recent poor performances of the Slovenian national team are again taking their toll. The soccer players who played at Euro 2000 and at the World Cup Finals 2002, who are referred to as the 'golden generation', are demanding the resignation of the president of the Slovenian Soccer Association and are blaming him for the downfall of Slovenian soccer. The media again play an important factor and give voice to the players, who could succeed in their aim. The reports on this matter are by no means objective and most of the reports visibly take the side of the players. But, by doing this, they are fulfilling their God-given (or, more precisely, Producer-given) task to entertain people either with action on the field or by the intrigues off it.

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NOVINARSKO REPREZENTOVANJE FUDBALA U SLOVENAČKOJ NACIONALNOJ IDENTIFIKACIJI

Gregor Starc

Izučavanje novinarskog reprezentovanja fudbala u Sloveniji obelodanjuje istoriju suprotnosti i napora i pokazuje efekte medijskih radnika i njihovih izveštaja na prihvatanje fudbala od publike. Tokom veka fudbal je funkcionisao kroz stalne rasprave o atraktivnosti igre i moralnim vrednostima, koje su mu svojstvene. Preovlađuje nacionalističko shvatanje koje je pratilo razvoj fudbala u Sloveniji i očigledni novinarski članci iz različitih perioda koji su negirali njegov potencijal da se razvija kao nacionalan, već je označen kao strani sport, opasan po zdravlje, nasilan i nemoralan sport. Ova studija analizira reprezentovanje najvišeg kvaliteta fudbala u Sloveniji tokom XX veka u sportskim novinama i pokazuje samo jedan deo analiziranih podataka koji adekvatno pokazuju preovlađujuća novinarska shvatanja o fudbalu tokom veka i objašnjava njegovu trenutnu društvenu poziciju.

Ključne reči: *fudbal, novine, historiografija, nacionalizam, moralnost*