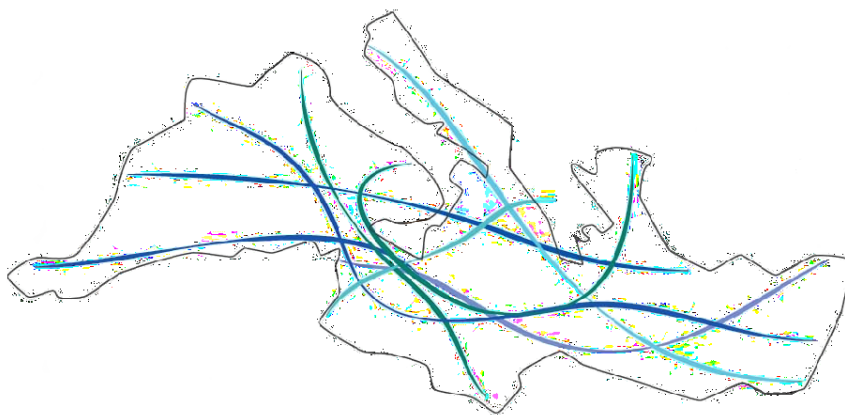


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GIUSEPPE D'ANGELO

***Fabien Archambault, Il controllo del pallone. I cattolici, i comunisti e il calcio in Italia (1943-anni Settanta), Firenze, Le Monnier, 2022, pp. XII-420***



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Author

Giuseppe D'Angelo, Università di Salerno, gidangelo@unisa.it

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*Fabien Archambault, Il controllo del pallone. I cattolici, i comunisti e il calcio in Italia (1943-anni Settanta), Firenze, Le Monnier, 2022, pp. XII-420.*

GIUSEPPE D'ANGELO  
Università di Salerno

In Italy, football is the most studied sport under the historical point of view, along with cycling. This is not surprising, because since several decades it has been not only the favourite sporting discipline of Italians, but also a tool able to shape national and local identities. Apart from some pioneering attempts, scholars started to study the history of football in 1954, with the famous *Storia del calcio in Italia* (Einaudi, Torino) of Antonio Ghirelli, a well-known journalist. In the following decades, particularly from the Nineties, several studies have analyzed the role of football and the characteristic of its evolution over the years. However, most studies have focused on professional football, highlighting its importance for the nationalization of the masses, but neglecting the amateur and popular dimension.

The recent book of Fabien Archambault fills this gap for one period of Italian history. The book, indeed, examines the history of Italian football from the end of the World War II to the Seventies and focuses mainly on amateur sport. The author takes into consideration the two most important “political” sporting federations, the *Centro Sportivo Italiano* (CSI), connected to the Church and supporter of the *Democrazia Cristiana* party, and the *Unione sportiva sport popolare* (UISP), established by the Communist party.

In the post-war period, as is known, Italian society was deeply divided and both Catholics and communists experienced the confrontation between them a good-against-evil fight. Sport, and particularly football, could not but be involved in this confrontation, also for the legacy of the Fascist regime. Mussolini had used sport as a tool for the politicization of the people and during the *Ventennio* physical activities had hugely spread, but amateur sport was controlled by the Fascist party and its collateral organizations, leaving little room to the independent societies. After the collapse of the regime, new political parties, first Christian-Democrats and Communists, collected this legacy, although in a completely different situation and without the aspiration to the totalitarianism.

The pages of Archambault describe the establishment and the evolution of CSI and UISP, their relations with the political arena, their geographical diffusion, their penetration into the society. What is interesting is that, in the previous decades, both in the catholic and the leftist area, the opposition to sport had been very strong and the physical activities had been often considered a frivolous distraction. After the World War II, Pio XII on the one side and Palmiro Togliatti on the other side understood the potentiality of sport for the socialization of the masses and for the propaganda of their ideas and beliefs, allowing the development of organizations such as CSI and UISP.

A section of *Il controllo del pallone* focuses on the politicization of professional football. Both Catholics and communists (the latter more vigorously) opposed professionalism, but they could not ignore it and, gradually, were forced to accept that their supporters followed the matches of the *Serie A*. Football, furthermore, was often viewed as a tool able to create political consent.

However, in the post-war Italy, football was also an element of modernization. Once overcome the crisis provoked by the war, in the Fifties Italian society changed, the economic situation improved and new ways of life became common all over the national territory. Football represented modernity and, not by chance, its popularity was connected with the diffusion of new media, particularly the television, which changed the fruition of sport. Football was the television sport *par excellence* and, after the beginning of regular broadcasting in 1954, its popularity increased. Between the Fifties and the Sixties, football took the place of cycling as favourite sport of Italians: the bicycle, despite being still used by millions people as a means of transportation, represented a backward Italy and, in a society that was discovering the mass motorization, began to lose its attractiveness.

Reading *Il controllo del pallone*, it is impossible not to notice the disparity between the North and the South of Italy, existing at both popular and professional level. It is well known that, over the years, the most competitive football clubs have come from the Northern regions, mainly from the industrial triangle Turin-Milan-Genoa. However, the problem also concerned (and, under certain respects, still concerns) the amateur sport. CSI and UISP were more active in the Centre-North of the Peninsula, more specifically the CSI in the Northern Regions (Lombardy, Piedmont, Liguria and Veneto) and the UISP in the «red» regions of Central Italy, *in primis* Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna.

More generally, the book in an insight into the Italy of the reconstruction and the economic miracle, seen through the lens of football. Of course, CSI and UISP did not represent all the amateur football: there were also other organizations, such as the *Gruppi Fiamma*, connected to the neo-fascist

party *Movimento sociale italiano*, the *Centri universitari sportivi*, which aimed at promoting sport in universities, and others.

In the final chapter, Archambault highlights the changes of the late Sixties and Seventies. The modernization and the development of civil society also affected sport. In the case of football, many independent clubs challenged the predominance of the politicized organizations, but both the CSI and the UISP kept a high number of members. Indeed, they are still today among the most important organizations for amateur sport.

The greatest value of the book is probably given by the accuracy of the research. Along with many printed sources, Archambault has consulted the archives of the CSI and the UISP, almost unknown among the Italian historians; furthermore, at the *Archivio Centrale dello Stato* he has not limited its research at the holding of the Ministry of Interior, like often happens in the works on the history of sport, but he also consulted other documental series, such as that of the Presidency of the Council.

*Il controllo del pallone* covers the period until the Seventies. In recent decades, football has deeply changed, both at amateur and professional level. The number of amateur clubs and schools has enormously grown and playing (often, in the five-a-side formula) is a pastime of a large percentage of youngsters. Furthermore, the game has undergone a sort of depoliticization and the attractiveness of organizations such as CSI and UISP has unavoidably diminished. Independent clubs have gained the upper hand. However, this does not mean that the relation between sport and politics has broken. For example, many political leaders are involved in the management of professional teams and often have used them as a tool for the creation of the consent. It is an old phenomenon, dating back almost to the Fascist regime and continued after the war, when the most evident case of “exploitation” of football for political purpose was that of Achille Lauro, leader of a monarchist party, major of Naples and president of the *Napoli* team in the Fifties. In recent times, this praxis has continued, although with different forms, and the case of Silvio Berlusconi is only the most known.

Moreover, some changes modified the fruition of sport. This evolution has begun during the “second economic miracle” of the Eighties, which caused a further modernization of society, and continues still today. Another novelty is the female involvement, almost unknown until few decades ago. In recent years, the female participation has gained popularity and recognition, also thanks to the performance of the national team, even if its popularity is not comparable to that of male football. Also migrations have affected football, as most immigrants come from geographical areas (Eastern Europe and Africa) where the game is very popular. Many teams have been established with the aim to integrate foreigners and sport is proving to be one of the better ways of intercultural

dialogue. The definition of “popular football”, once used by the UISP to identify its initiatives, today often refers to immigrant teams, established by left-wing groups.

The hope is that, after *Il controllo del pallone*, new studies may analyze the recent developments of football and its relation with the evolution of the Italian society.