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Bread and Circuses: Mussolini, Football, and the 1934 World Cup

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Bread and Circuses: Mussolini, Football, and the 1934 World Cup

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
Of Bard College

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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To my Mom and Sister- for always encouraging me to pursue my passions and dreams

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INTRODUCTION

In 1934 Italy hosted the World Cup under the rule of the Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini. Throughout this event, Mussolini was known by most to be a hero to the Italian people. He was also known for his unique fascist philosophy and style, which included ideas such as the “new man,” and militarism, as well as cooperation with the Catholic Church. He also used grassroots organizations like football clubs to spread propaganda to increase his popularity and hide the atrocities behind the success of football. This was a tactic from the fascist regime to control the smallest elements of society to large administrative bodies, like implementing fascist ideas through the education of students and therefore relaying those ideas back to the family. Later, as historian Gabriel Maletta points out, by “reorganizing the league structures and making it marginally under the control of government-appointed persons, the regime sought to use the sport as a tool of unifying its people and exporting the virtues of fascism to the rest of the world.”¹ Mussolini therefore first used sport as part of a fascist government. Through this project, I will explore what Italian Fascism was and how Mussolini used Italian Fascism to influence the Italian people. I will explore what links Italian football and fascism had throughout the 1930s specifically focusing on the 1934 World Cup, hosted by Italy. Then I will shift focus on how Italy was able to host the World Cup—the event itself, the propaganda involved, and how Italian clubs influenced it. With the Italians winning the 1934 World Cup, I will discover how the aftermath of the competition influenced Italy and other countries. Overall through this project, I want to examine the extent to which Mussolini’s strategy may have been effective in achieving nationalism, unity of the nation, and his policy objectives.

¹ Gabriel Maletta, “Fascism: Good or Bad for Italian Football?,” *Sports History at Trinity College (CT)* (blog), January 10, 2014, <https://commons.trincoll.edu/sportshistory/2014/01/10/fascism-good-or-bad-for-italian-football/>.

The Rise of Mussolini and Italian Facism

Mussolini was not the first person to start fascist ideals. There was a political movement that predates his type of fascism. This is called proto-fascism. “By definition,” Brian Duigan writes, “proto-fascist movements display some of the common characteristics of fascism—such as the scapegoating of ethnic or religious minorities, the glorification of violence, and the promotion of the Führerprinzip (‘leadership principle’), the belief that the party and the state should have a single leader with absolute power—but usually do not share its radicalism or totalitarian ambitions.”² In Italy, Gabriele D’Annunzio started a movement in the contested region city-state of Fiume. The poet was obsessed with ensuring Fiume did not fall to the Habsburg Monarchy of the Austrian-Hungary Empire. D’Annunzio went to the city, declaring himself the Duce of Fiume, and stated he would do this until Italy claimed it. To keep his place as dictator D’Annunzio used national ideologies such as the motto “Italy or death,” and promoted violence, he also used propaganda campaigns using flags to express Italianism. Historian Dominique Kirchner Reill described “the Fiume crisis as an incident that helps modern society gain more insight about the birth of fascism, postwar nationalist activism, and the fall of empire after 1918 by telling the story of the three-year period when the Adriatic port-city Fiume (today known by its Croatian name Rijeka) became an international fiasco that stalled negotiations at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference and became the setting for the fifteen-month occupation of the city by the poet-soldier Gabriele D’Annunzio, an occupation many believe Mussolini copied explicitly in his rise to power”.³ For this project we really only need to focus on the last point about how Mussolini took these ideals and the writings of individuals such Gabriele D’Annunzio

² Brian Duigan, “Proto Fascism,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, May 2, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/protofascism>.

³ Dominique Kirchner Reill, “The Fiume Crisis: Life in the Wake of the Habsburg Empire,” Dominique Kirchner Reill: A historian’s portfolio, 2020, <https://www.dominiquereill.com/fiume-crisis>.

and Giuseppe Prezzolini to create a name and ideology for Italian Fascism. After working for a newspaper called *Il Popolo d'Italia* and the group *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* he gained popularity throughout Italy. In 1921 he founded the fascist party, turning what once was a parliamentary movement into a full-on formal political party. On October 31st, 1922 Mussolini and his followers Marched on Rome, the King, Victor Emmanuel III appointed him as the prime minister. “Benito Mussolini came up with the term fascism,” notes Olivia B. Waxman, “he created the first one-party fascist state and he set the playbook and template for everything that came after.”⁴ The word fascism comes from the word *fascio*, which represents bundles of people, which are his followers. Mussolini states in his *Doctrine of Fascism* that “in politics Fascism aims at realism; in practice, it desires to deal only with those problems which are the spontaneous product of historic conditions and which find or suggest their own solutions. Only by entering into the process of reality and taking possession of the forces at work within it, can man act on man and on nature.”⁵ Mussolini’s political ideologies included being the absolute power of the nation, nationalism, superiority of being Italian, corporatism, and militarism. This means that the fascist regime had control of society by declaring that all individuals must give up their private needs to submit to the state. They also controlled all labor forces and, therefore, the Italian economy. Through this micromanagement, Mussolini was able to control individuals in the labor force’s actions and thoughts by outlawing strikes and unions. Mussolini also used ideas from D’Annunzio to invoke extreme nationalism, for example, “the Roman salute and the “Eia! Eia! Eia! Alalà!”⁶ chants as well as using the Italian flag to show pride in the nation. This also manifested itself in the use of myths, like the belief of the new man, which means that through

⁴ Olivia B. Waxman, “What to Know About the Origins of Fascism’s Brutal Ideology,” .com, *Times* (blog), March 22, 2019, <https://time.com/5556242/what-is-fascism/>.

⁵ Benito Mussolini, “The Doctrine Of Fascism Benito Mussolini (1932),” trans. Giovanni Gentile, 1935, <https://ia600800.us.archive.org/14/items/TheDoctrineOfFascismByBenitoMussolini/The%20Doctrine%20of%20Fascism%20by%20Benito%20Mussolini.pdfv>.

⁶ Dominique Kirchner Reill, *The Fiume Crisis* (the belknap press of harvard university press, 2020), 8.

fascism a man would have the power of an ancient Roman warrior, therefore being the superior race. Being the superior nation also included expelling anyone different, such as people of different races, political ideologies, and religions. With this belief Mussolini was also able to create a state based on militarism, his paramilitary group the Black Shirts, used violence to promote physical strength, discipline, obedience, and courage. With these main fascist ideas, Mussolini became a leader on the world stage and later became an influence not just on Hitler but also on politicians in liberal democracies such as Britain and the United States.

Mussolini, Fascism, and Football

Football had come a long way in a very short period of time in Italy. At one point during the late 1800s football as well as other sports were seen as a distraction to a young man's faith and therefore banned for all Catholics by the Pope. The Nonexpedit decree was lifted in 1904, and sports and the idea of leisure time quickly spread throughout the nation. There became a power struggle in creating federations for sports leagues because secular middle-class nationalists wanted to keep confessional organizations from joining. Therefore, with the absence of a national group taking a hands-on role in promoting football; "Italian football was created in the most cosmopolitan industrial cities of the country by a band of British and Swiss businessmen, their Italian counterparts, enthusiastic aristocrats and bored students and upper-class school boys."⁷ This is different from how football initially developed in several countries, like England, and the Netherlands because football developed where railway lines were built, creating popularity through the working class. This made football a game divided by class. The divide in football is different in Italy because of the way it developed. Football in Italy instead created social division through intercity rivalries. For example, the creation of Juventus in 1897 and Torino FC in 1906, these teams have the longest-standing rivalry in Italian

⁷ David Goldblatt, *The Ball Is Round: A Global History of Soccer* (Penguin Group, n.d.), 152.

football. The rivalry between the teams started because Juventus staff wanted to move the club out of Turin, therefore key members had falling outs. They left, bringing their talents to FC Torinese, this merger of players between the two teams created Torino FC. To add to the rivalry Torino FC was backed by British businessmen while Juventus was created by Italian aristocrats, making Juve more Italian than Torino. This is the same rivalry seen between the two main teams in Milan, Internazionale Milan wanted to have foreign players while AC Milano was created because they wanted the team to be more Italian, only accepting the minimum required amount of foreign players. The foundation of some of the oldest Italian clubs has a history of promoting Italian nationalism through football. “There was even a desire from the Italian Football Federation to adopt the word calcio as the name rather than football: a symbolic victory based on an invented history”.⁸ The need for formal competitions and leagues developed with the creation of more teams, mostly in northern industrial cities. “In 1889 the first national championship was held, although it was an exaggeration because there were only three teams from Turin that participated”. From this first competition then developed competitions including the south of Italy, and then the top regional teams would play each other. This format was extended in 1929, to a round-robin, this is how the modern league is played.

Throughout Mussoli’s rise to power, he had a great ambition to restore Italy to the power and beauty of Ancient Rome, including its famous games. A way he was able to secure support was through nationalizing football. It promoted unity, power, strength, and beauty, all characteristics of fascism under Mussolini. Therefore football would become an important factor in relaying his power to the public. Training for sports became almost another branch of the military. “Football demanded an awareness of teammates and a kind of selflessness,” writes Slater, “since a given player may not touch the ball for minutes on end while running almost

⁸ David Goldblatt, 154.

constantly.”⁹ It was easy to implement fascist ideals into football since it is a game that requires structure, organization, technical ability, and strength. These are all characteristics that are also required for the military. Instituting football as the national sport not only raised fitness levels across the country but became an institution of fascism itself. “ Mussolini argued that Fascism, now and always, believes in holiness and heroism. Through calcio, fascists could momentarily stop culling through history in search of great Italians to mythologize; sports create instant heroes out of almost nothing.”¹⁰ Through this type of re-education through sports Mussolini was able to obtain some control of the Italian youth, implementing fascist ideals into young minds. Therefore the fascist party was also able to promote ideas of the new man through football, promoting self-sacrifice and the idea of the country over one’s own self, by putting the team before your own goals.

For twenty one years Mussolini used fascism to create an ultra-violent nation that was based on national pride and violence. There is even a theory that Mussolini wanted teams to base their playing style off of an ancient Italian game called Calcio Fiorentini. “Mussolini wanted coaches to use tactics from this game because traditionally it is hosted by armed men who fight their way through one another to score a goal utilizing hand-to-hand combat and brutality.”¹¹ “He went as far as to have a documentary broadcast on radio about the “true” origins of football in Italy from the 16th century just before the final.”¹² To Mussolini, this was the true inspiration for modern football, not the English; he wanted to erase the history of football being a foreign game. Throughout Mussolini’s reign, Italian football was at the height of violence as we will see during the 1934 World Cup. Fans could see this aggressive style, especially in the semi-final

⁹ Will Slater, “The Evolution And Political Dynamism Of Football In Mussolini’s Italy,” *The False 9* (blog), May 25, 2020.

¹⁰ will slater.

¹¹ Jim Hart, “When The World Cup Rolled Into Fascist Italy In 1934,” *These Football Times*, July 27, 2016, <https://thesefootballtimes.co/2016/07/27/when-the-world-cup-rolled-into-fascist-italy-in-1934/>.

¹² Jim Hart.

match against Spain, along with just about every other match. Specifically the game against Spain has become known for its brutality and fierceness.

CHAPTER 1: Links between Mussolini and Fascism

Sometimes it is difficult to pinpoint how Mussolini accomplished his goals through fascism since both are also associated with other types of governing bodies that also occurred during the twentieth century, such as monarchy, dictatorship, parliamentary rule, and totalitarianism. Without Mussolini, Fascism would not have been successful in Italy. “Fascism was fundamentally nothing but mussolinism;” writes Halperin, “the Duce’s speeches and writing, including a few essays erroneously attributed to him, constituted the bible of the movement”.¹³ There are different types of fascism that stemmed out of adoration of Mussolini such as in Japan or Spain. Italian Fascism is unique to other governing bodies because of the use of nationalism, decadence, anti-egalitarianism, superiority of being Italian, corporatism, and militarism. Mussolini made promises that fascism would make Italy a better society through creating “a republic on equal suffrage for both sexes: introduction of the referendum and popular initiative; abolition of the senate and decentralization of the executive power; suppression of all titles based on caste or class; universal disarmament, an end to conscription, and a ban on the manufacturing of arms; dissolution of business corporations and the outlawry of speculation by stock exchanges and banks; a capital levy and the confiscation of the “unproductive” income; establishment of the eight hour work day; prophet sharing for workers, and their participation in the management of certain enterprises.¹⁴ It was easy for the fascist party to take over because the Socialist party and the Church were too slow to gain support and mobilize throughout the country. The Socialist Party took an altogether different position, they rejected democratic legal methods, refused co-operation of any kind with the bourgeois parties of the left, and they demanded a fight to the knife against the monarchy as well as the capitalist system.¹⁵ Mussoli’s

¹³ S, William Halperin, *Mussolini and Italian Fascism* (Van Nostrand, 1964), 3.

¹⁴ S, William Halperin, 29.

¹⁵ S, William Halperin, 17.

ability to use his charisma and propaganda tools allowed him to enhance the properties of fascism, making it easy for people to follow him from other sides of the political spectrum. “His strategy was threefold to entice the workers away from Socialist Party by outbidding it; to press his courtship of the businessman who's helped he would continue to need; to woo all patriotic elements regardless the class of like glorifying nationalism and aping D’Annunzio annexationist, chauvinist line.¹⁶ Mussolini was also to prey on soldiers coming home from the battlefields of World War One. He specifically used nationalism and the promise of a better economy to entice them to give everything to the state.

Mussolini officially came into power on the 29th of October when he Marched on Rome. This is where he forcefully took power from King Victor Emmanuel III and became the ‘Duce’, the leader of Italy (although the King remained the titular head of state). At the close of the demonstration Mussolini issued a Stern ultimatum “either they will give us the government or we shall seize it by descending on Rome: it is now a matter of days, perhaps of hours.”¹⁷ “...Black shirts in Northern and Central Italy took possession of arsenals, police headquarters, railway stations, telegraphs, and telephone offices’.¹⁸ Mussolini wanted to get control of Italy with an all or nothing attack and attitude. The March on Rome although planned out for a great period of time had been accomplished faster and easier than expected. There was little to no resistance from the King’s troops despite them outnumbering Mussolini’s paramilitary group.

It seems that the promises of a modern Italy where the country would be unified was a collective dream amongst the masses. People would travel from all parts of Italy to hear and see Mussolini. With guarantees of work and a better economy people would gather for hours to witness Mussolin’s charisma. With the smallest of movements Mussolini could make a crowd go

¹⁶ S, William Halperin, 31.

¹⁷ S, William Halperin, 37.

¹⁸ S, William Halperin, 37.

ballistic. He is quite famous for having great speeches on balconies to a crowd below him, and using facial expressions and hand movement. For example he once gave a speech to a crowd saying:

Believe! Obey! Fight!!

He who has steel has bread!

Nothing has ever been done in history without bloodshed!

Better to live one day like a lion than 100 years like a sheep!

War is to the male what childbearing is to the female!

A minute on the battlefield is worth a lifetime of peace!¹⁹

Afterwards Italians could see refrains posted around the entire country on posters, in newspapers, or on the radio. They could also see other propaganda graffitied on walls like the saying, ‘Mussolini is always right’, so it was a never ending bombardment to the Italian people.

For Mussolini to obtain more support in the south of Italy he would make lavish promises to create more work and bring the economy to them. He would make campaigns to improve agricultural working conditions. People were hopeful that their treatment would change with Mussolini. Especially since before the pre-fascist era and during, it was believed that the Italian state had failed the peasants in the south and central parts of Italy. Despite all the promises and ‘change’ this did not really change much in the twenty plus years Mussolini was in charge. Most of the change and favors were given to the proletariat and massive landowners in the south. These people were able to obtain more food, land, and status as the rest of the south continued to struggle to obtain crop yields, food, and a substantial income. One way this ‘slipped’ past the masses was because there were other initiatives that took place that distracted people from what was not being accomplished. For example, when the Pontine Marshes were drained and

¹⁹ S, William Halperin, 47.

developed to house more people in the countryside instead of crowded cities. The government also implemented several policies to create new cities in the countryside. One of these policies “the “empty the cities” policy of 1928 stemmed from the regime’s desire to reinforce family values and prompt a mass-migration back to the land in an effort to augment Italy’s low birth rate and reverse the flight to urban areas stemming from investment in capital-intensive industries. To achieve these goals, Mussolini sanctioned all methods, including forced relocation, to return urban immigrants, particularly the unemployed, to the countryside. Meanwhile, peasants in the North, affluent compared to their Southern counterparts, were spared the worst of both policies because of their more advanced state of farming. Due to the policy’s limited success, football was utilized to supply the necessary cohesive force although it too produced mixed results and at times reinforced the divisions it was intended to eradicate.²⁰

The Pontine Marshes was a land reclamation project about 60 km south of Rome with initial efforts to improve the country's grain momentum in the 1930s. There are two reasons for this, “Firstly, land reclamation workers in the thousands moved into the area, albeit temporarily, to transform the landscape. Secondly, the newly reclaimed marshes, new towns and outlying planned villages (*borghi*) were populated with colonist families migrating from other regions in Italy”.²¹ Along with the fascist state wanting to cultivate more agriculture for the country they wanted people to move into this rural area because it was associated with fertility and health. This was one effective initiative to get people to pick up their life and move into rural undeveloped areas, which later helped the nation's growth in population rates. The regime’s leadership believed that agricultural and urban opportunities in the reclaimed Pontine Marshes

²⁰ Alexander Wynn, “The Goooooooals of Government: Football as a Political Tool of Fascism and Nazism” (Middletown, Connecticut, Wesleyan University, 2007), 22.

²¹Federico Caprotti, “Internal Colonisation, Hegemony and Coercion: Investigating Migration to Southern Lazio, Italy, in the 1930s,” *Geoforum* 39, no. 2 (March 2008): 942–57.

could not only stop internal migrants from targeting large industrial cities, but also attract Italians who had migrated abroad. Mussolini attempted to lure emigrants back to the Italian countryside, with the promise of land and housing in the new towns built by the regime. In reality there were not as many people moving to the south of Italy in comparison to the north of Italy but with the development of the Pontine Marshes this all changed. Before the 1930s, a majority of the population moving north (hundreds of thousands of people) were going to places where there were high volumes of cities such as the region of Lombardy. This was a main attraction city at the time since Mussolini started fascism from Milan and had many influential people working at newspapers and magazines. With the development of the Pontine Marshes migration skyrocketed from regions like Veneto and Emilia Romagna because the people fell for the regime's internal colonization propaganda. "The Pontine Marshes thus became a working, living metaphor for the regime's modernizing drive, aimed at the restoration of traditional pre-industrial values in a "pristine" natural area where nature could be conquered and a fascist rural-urban utopia constructed in its place".²² Other reasons for people to migrate from the north to the south of Italy was because of the economy, many people could not find jobs even though the regime promoted the wealth of the economy and fruitful jobs. For example, "migration from the Veneto region occurred at a problematic time for employment: the year in which Littoria was constructed was also a time of industrial strife in Veneto".²³ People would also move to the south of Italy voluntarily but they were still probably influenced by the regime at some point to transition their lives to places like the Pontine Marshes. The regime wanted to decrease the population in cities to make them less crowded and congested. These were most likely the people that were promised land and jobs and a majority of the people probably faced the same

²² Federico Caprotti.

²³ Federico Caprotti.

problem as before unless they had a relationship with the regime or were people working directly with the fascist government. Along with Mussolini's project of the Pontine Marshes and the creation of new cities such as Lantine formerly known as Littoria, his followers established a soccer club and stadium in the area so people had access to fitness. Before any construction or planning of the city broke ground Mussolini visited the city to deliver a speech for the people already living in the rural area of the Pontine Marshes. The speech follows:

The birth of Littoria

(19 December 1932)

Fascism ended in 1932 with the foundation of the city of Littoria, which was followed, a short time later, by Sabaudia and Pontinia, living evidence of the rebirth of Agro Pontino. The Duce, from the balcony of the Town Hall of Littoria, delivered the following speech on 19 December 1932:

Comrades!

Today is a great day for the Black Shirt Revolution, it is an auspicious day for Agro Pontino. It is a glorious day in the history of the nation.

What was attempted in vain over the past 25 centuries, today we are translating into a living reality.

This would be the moment to be proud. No! We are only a little moved and those who lived through the great and tragic days of the victorious war, passing in front of the names that recall

the Grappa, the Carso, the Isonzo,

memories tumultuous in their hearts. Today, with the official inauguration of the new municipality of Littoria, we consider the first stage of our journey completed. (Loud applause).

That is, we have won our first battle. But we are fascists, and therefore rather than looking to the past we are always intent on the future. (Thunderous applause.)

Until all battles are won, the entire war cannot be said to be victorious. Only when, alongside the 500 houses built today, another 4,500 have arisen, when alongside the 10 thousand current inhabitants there are the 40-50 thousand that we intend to make live in what were the Pontine Marshes, only then will we be able to launch to the Nation the bulletin of the definitive victory.

(Prolonged applause)

We would not be fascists if already from this moment we did not specify with the accuracy that is in our costume, with the energy that is in our temperament, what will be the future stages and that is: on October 28, 1933 another 981 farmhouses will be inaugurated; on April 21, 1934 the new municipality of Sabaudia will be inaugurated. (Applause).

Please note these dates. On October 28, 1935, the third municipality will be inaugurated: Pontinia. At that time, by that date, we will probably have reached the goal and realized our entire work plan.

I want to praise the president of the O. N. C., then his immediate collaborators, the engineers, the technicians all. I want to praise the workers who came from all parts of Italy and the settlers who came here to work from the lands of Veneto and the Po Valley.

It may be worth remembering that once, to find a job, it was necessary to cross the Alps or cross the ocean. Today the earth is here, only half an hour from Rome. This is where we conquered a new province. This is where we have conducted and will conduct real war operations.

This is the war we prefer. But we need to leave us to our work. (Applause and acclamation).

Littoria's new life begins. I am sure that the settlers who have arrived here will be happy to get to work also because they have in sight, in 15 or 20 years, the definitive possession of their farm.

I say to the peasants and the rural people, who are particularly close to my spirit, that they, as old soldiers, must proudly face the difficulties they encounter when a new effort begins. They must look at this land that dominates the plain and that is a symbol of fascist power. Converging towards it they will find, when needed, help and justice!²⁴

When Mussolini was giving this speech he was inspiring the new city of Littoria to start and keep their lives in Littoria for years to come. He also explained how the land would be great for their prosperity as they would be able to prosper for the land in terms of farming and agriculture. I think Mussolini is also demonstrating the strength and organization of the regime to be able to create this new fascist community. Lastly he mentions that the new city of Littoria is only an hour and a half away from Rome, making the people listening feel that he is always present and close to them.

Once his devoted followers were more settled in the area there was a desire to include a stadium to encourage people to stay fit. The club was established in 1932 and is called Unione Sportiva Latina Calcio although it has been a place for people to obtain football greatness the club has never reached Serie A. Throughout the club's history it has rebranded several times to try and bring more attention and funds to the club. In 1932 Oriolo Frezzotti, an architect, commissioned by Mussolini and directly chosen by the head of the Opera Nazionale Combattenti to design the city of Littoria. During the construction of the city Frezzotti was sure to include designs for the Balilla, and a dopolavoro office and other fascist organizations. He made sure that these buildings were up to standard with the fascist code of architecture. For example, the Balilla home base is one of the greatest representations of the littorio style, it was constructed to be an enormous building with an M shaped monument for Mussolini. Frezzotti, commissioned by the

²⁴ Mussolini Benito, "Works, Speeches and Writings (1914-1942)," n.d., <https://www.adamoli.org/benito-mussolini/index.htm>.

National Opera of Fighters and Veterans, built the Municipal Stadium and had its opening in 1935. “The stadium was originally equipped with an athletics track and a single stand on the western side of the pitch. As the decades passed, the track fell into disrepair and was dismantled, while the stands were progressively expanded to encompass all sides of the pitch”.²⁵ During the construction of the stadium of course to get approved Frezzotti had to follow the fascist style of the era. Characteristics of the fascist style can still be seen in the stadium today, such as, “a peculiar architectural feature of the facility is the monumental entrance gate to Piazzale Serratore, built in the rationalist style of the fascist era. Also peculiar is the location of the changing rooms, in an independent building located between the south curve and the open grandstand”.²⁶ All of these characteristics can still be seen today in the city of Latina, as the city seems to acknowledge its fascist past, but the buildings are all repurposed into other government buildings or homes.

Few were safe from the grasp of fascism; when children went to school many of them were influenced by fascism on a daily basis. Teachers, who were approved by the state, instilled the values of fascism by textbooks that were carefully handpicked and written to teach the new generation of the ‘Italian man and woman’. In schools there would also be sayings from Mussolini plastered and written around the schools. When these students graduated from middle school or high school they were often enlisted into afterschool youth organizations to demonstrate how to use fascist ideals and uphold the propaganda being taught to them. The three main organizations young people would go to were the Balilla, Avanguardisti, and Giovani Fascisti. This is where Mussolini was able to cultivate ideas from like minded young fascist. Once in these organizations young people would be taught about the military, writing for

²⁵ “Frezzotti, Oriolo,” in *Biographical Dictionary of Italians*, 1998, https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/oriolo-frezzotti_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/.

²⁶ “Domenico Francioni Stadium,” *Latina Calcio 1932*, n.d., <https://www.latinacalcio1932.com/domenico-francioni/>.

magazines, the fascist politics, and sports. The Nazionale Balilla was established on April 3rd 1926 and this youth organization was specifically focused on the physical ability and moral health of young fascists. "It was classified for the performance of physical activity, children from 8 to 18 years old in 2 distinct formations and "took care of the physical and moral preparation of young Italians" and promised them the glory of dressing in the paramilitary uniforms when they are adults."²⁷ One of the most famous and oldest Italian universities, University of Bologna, was a fascist feeder school. It was once associated with teaching fascist mysticism and through the fascist culture of the university, its ideals spread through the rest of the city. It was also a hub for the youth organizations but since they were older they would take on more responsibility, gearing up to be lifelong members of the fascist party. When graduates from the senior youth organizations were old enough to enter the fascist party they had to demonstrate that they were loyal to the party. For example, when the young fascists (*giovani fascisti*) entered the party, they had to take the following oath before the political secretary before they could officially become a full fledged member of the fascist party. They stated to the *Fascio di Combattimento*, "I swear to carry without discussion of the orders of the Duce and to serve the cause of the fascist Revolution with all my might".²⁸ If these young up and coming members of society resisted they would face extreme penalties from the party that could vary from a reprimand to full expulsion from the party or even the nation.

²⁷ kulthapa, "Sport During the Twenty Years of Fascism," *Vespa: pensieri di qua e di la'* (blog), March 12, 2019, <https://sites.bc.edu/vespa/2019/03/12/lo-sport-durante-il-ventennio-fascista/>.

²⁸ Simon Martin, *Football and Fascism: The National Game under Mussolini* (Berg, 2004), 45.

CHAPTER 2: The Development of Football and the 1934 World Cup

Football under Mussolini transitioned from a game to a fascist sport that would aid in the political propaganda spread through Italy. Fascism only increased throughout Italy due to football in 1926. This was because Mussolini wanted to make sport, specifically football, a part of the country's identity. This push of uniformity from identity came from the need for Italy to unite its regions into one country. Therefore Mussolini thought sports would help the county unite and through sport he would dissolve the tension throughout the country. With this idea of unifying through football Mussolini exploited the domestic game to enhance the national team. “Football has become a great industry, where all the results are accurately recorded, cataloged, utilized and exported. The press and the schools serve propaganda: they feed the young a vein of pride and some sporting success.. and together they excite that passion... that holds no danger. Sport cooperates in the most efficient mode to hold the country in a blissful infancy”.²⁹

On June 26th 1926, CONI (the Italian National olympic committee) instituted a group of reforms called the Carta di Viareggio. “The FIGC, having been the subordinate beneath CONI, was already an organ of the party. The FIGC president and the Direttorio Federale now exercised absolute power and authority over football matters, this transition to Fascist sport illustrated by the addition of the Sabauda Shield that was the crest of all Coni members.”³⁰ In effect of creating a better national team the system of Italian leagues were combined together from three separate leagues based on geography. Although affecting all levels of the sport the most significant changes happened at the top flight with the restructuring of the league. The new national league was created from a total of twenty teams, sixteen from the old northern league, three from the southern leagues from Lazio to Campagna, and one last spot to be filled from a

²⁹ Simon Martin, 3.

³⁰ Simon Martin, 58.

play off game.³¹ The Carta di Viareggio also established the difference between professionalism and amateurism, which created a hierarchical system (division 1 and 2) where teams were divided based on geographical and economic needs. A team could either move up or down a division based on their position in the national table, first place moves up a division, last place moves down a division. This was thought to bring the nation together on the football front in addition to promoting football in the south, especially with Napoli being a contender in the first division. Therefore there was hope that football and other sports would give hope to the south and develop to the same level as the north.

The Carta di Viareggio from the FIGC

FIGC organization:	At the top of the Federation there is a Federal Directorate (non-elective)
	The Italian Technical Arbitration Committee (CITA) replaces the abolished AIA.
	The Regional Committees and Leagues are dissolved and replaced by the Directors of the Upper Divisions and the Directors of the Lower North and South and Regional Divisions.
	Every managerial appointment in any club affiliated to CONI must receive the approval of the Fascist Provincial Sports Bodies, thus ousting managers disliked by the regime.

³¹ Simon Martin, 59.

Championship Reform:	Introduction of a single group, the National Division for the awarding of the scudetto, made up of two groups for a total of 20 teams (17 from the former Northern League, and 3 from the former Southern League).
	In the lower levels the First and Second Divisions are established.
Player status reform:	Divides footballers into two categories: amateurs and non-amateurs, the first historic turning point in Italian football's transition towards professionalism.
	Abolishes the provincial limit for transfer lists (players had to play where resident), players are free to move.
	Abolishes the possibility of having foreigners in the team (with a transitional rule for 2 foreigners for the following season). The many Hungarians and Austrians leave Italy, the richest clubs start looking for Italians in South America, the phenomenon of the natives. ³²

Before Mussolini took charge of Italy there was already a reliance on football players to demonstrate the strength of Italy by participating in the Great War. It was determined that about fifty percent of military combatants, conscripted or voluntary, were from football clubs or

³² FIGC, "The 'Viareggio Charter' and the Fascist Reorganization of Football," n.d., <https://www.figc.it/it/federazione/la-federazione/la-storia-della-federazione-approfondimenti/la-carta-di-viareggio-e-la-riorganizzazione-fascista-del-calcio/>.

sporting societies.³³ The sacrifice of leaving their clubs behind to help Italy in the war made up the numbers to full mobilization against the allies. These sportsmen brought their athletic talents to the battlefield in hopes of providing strength to a losing nation. Anyone who died for Italy in the war was considered to be a hero but the sports players who died were honored on another level. “Lo Sport di Fascista stated heroes whose memory and example will last long in the history of Italy, Heroes that left reality to immortalize themselves into Legend”.³⁴ Knowing that fallen heroes would receive forever legendary status helped athletes risk their lives again once Mussolini entered WWII. Once again athletes were expected to honor Italy by providing their services to the military, during that time they were also expected to hold the utmost seriousness, moral conduct, and responsibility. After the war Mussolini had only expected the most from returning sports players. Every time they entered the field they should confront their opponents as if they were still in combat. Therefore the war had only prepared them better for any sort of competition. It was also known that if they did not perform in a way that showed sacrifice and blood, then they could always be sent back to the frontlines or conscripted for military service. With this mentality it was simple to use language to make football matches more intense, as if viewers were listening to letters from the battlefield.

Since the Great War Mussolini and his followers put an emphasis on physical education whether it was football or gymnastics. It was thought that the Italians were not fit enough during the Great War so that was one of the contributing reasons they struggled to win quickly. In preparation to create the New Man the intervention for physical education was to instate fascist qualities into after work activities. To use physical education as a fascist propaganda tool a few standard principles were later identifiable such as: “the fusion of classical Greco-Roman concept

³³ “Lo Sport Fascista,” 1928, 42.

³⁴ Simon Martin, *Football and Fascism: The National Game under Mussolini*, 29.

of physical education with the medieval element of war-like preparation. To solve the problem of propaganda with the creation of larger stadiums (Littoriale, PNF Stadium, Milan Arena, and Mussolini Stadium). To penetrate the masses with the creation of numerous gymnasiums and sports fields to no longer be teaching in the hands of exponents of old style gymnastics, but to interest it to the young who were strong and ready, not only physically”.³⁵ To ensure that these fascist ideals were being enforced Mussolini and his cronies made it compulsory to have physical education in schools and when constructing new stadiums for football teams to have a track or tennis courts surrounding the stadiums. This made it simpler for the average Italian to work out since they had all the equipment they could dream of. At first this all came free to Italians such as entry and equipment, In return their betterment of physical and mental fitness would benefit the rest of fascist Italy.

One of the most renowned stadiums in Italy is the Stadio Renato Dall'Ara but was once known as the Littoriale. The stadium was regarded to be the modern day Colosseum as the architects included an athletic track, tennis courts, two swimming pools and one of them was the first covered pool in Italy.³⁶ The stadium has to meet the requirements of fascist architecture, which included being multiplied, for other sporting events, military, and speeches, as well as having characteristics such as a roman style, towers, marble, statues, a balcony or open skeletons of the structure (Figure 1-3). The Littoriale also included a statue of Mussolini on his horse, which demonstrated the club's ties to fascism as well as the fascist spirit (Figure 5). The stadium stemmed from the visions of Leandro Arpinati as he was the podesta (Mayor) of Bologna as well as obtaining several sports positions throughout the regime such as the President of the Italian

³⁵ Simon Martin, 32.

³⁶ “The History of Dall’Ara Stadium,” Bologna FC 1909, accessed April 6, 2024, <https://www.bolognafc.it/en/the-stadium/#:~:text=The%20construction%20of%20a%20large,funded%20by%20a%20public%20body>.

National Olympic Committee (CONI) and of the Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio (Italian football federation): he led the reformation of the Serie A championship on national level, and organized the 1934 FIFA World Cup.³⁷ During Arpinati's time as mayor of Bologna it was his greatest desire to put Bologna on the map for football and fascism. Because of his attitude towards making the city into the destination for football and fascism he wanted there to be a stadium to match the grandiose appearance of the regime. He originally wanted the stadium to be built in twelve months although it ended up taking three years to officially finish construction and open the grounds to the public. Arpinati even indicated a fundraiser for fans and community members to buy a brick for the stadium so he could insure it would open on time. "Therefore weeks before the Littoriale's opening ceremony in the presence of Mussolini, Arpinati launched a 'buy a brick' appeal in *Il Resto del Carlino* asking readers to contribute as much or as little as they could afford. Raising a total of 857,175 lire, it was another example of the local party taking itself directly to the people in an effort to create a shared experience around the new stadium, even if 'contributions' were not always voluntary".³⁸ To inspire the city Mussolini even visited to be the first to buy and lay a brick down, therefore of course showing his superiority and being at the top of the list. This act of propaganda was to insure the city's allegiance to the state and so the Duce could secure his long term goals of having fascism dominate everything.

³⁷ "Leandro Arpinati," Olympedia, n.d., <https://www.olympedia.org/athletes/1201220>.

³⁸ Simon Martin, *Football and Fascism: The National Game under Mussolini*, 123.



Figure 1. The Littoriale was constructed to almost imitate the colosseum with its oval shape and arches. In the photo we can see several examples of fascist architecture. The stadium is being constructed around an area that is less developed but has people living around it so people would have to witness the work everyday. We can see the beginning of a football field as well as a track being installed. If you look closely at the stadium seats you can see distinct sections going all the way to the back to the stadium so people can be packed in and controlled when entering and exiting.³⁹

³⁹ “Fascist Youth in Italy and Sport Infrastructure,” Socratis Konstantinou ~ Thoughts on Politics, History and Football, September 26, 2012, <https://socratis.wordpress.com/2012/09/26/fascist-youth-in-italy-and-sport-infrastructur>.



Figure 2. A photo of the Littoriale where we can clearly see a tower constructed. Details included on the tower to note are the roman arches and the balcony.⁴⁰



Figure 3. The Littoriale stadium today, renamed as Stadio Renato Dall'Ara. Clear example of the stadium being used for a football match but we can see its multi-functional ability with the track around the field. It also shows the tower which is still standing today.⁴¹

⁴⁰ "Stadio Littoriale," Alamy, November 20, 2017, <https://www.alamy.com/english-stadio-littoriale-20-november-2017-unknown-84-stadio-littoriale-bologna-image208255429.html?imageid=676AB89F-0071-428D-963B-6153B8E66AF4&p=650648&pn=1&searchId=e6c0b62f9ea637347d0f9eae0775a67c&searchtype=0>.

⁴¹ "Stadio Renato Dall'Ara," Il calcio. net, accessed April 21, 2024, <https://ilcalcio.net/stadi/dallara.php>.



Figure 4. 50,000 Blackshirts saluting Mussolini on horseback at the Littoriale stadium on October 31, 1926.⁴²

⁴² Mondadori Portfolio, “Benito Mussolini at the Littoriale,” Gettyimages, March 16, 2012, <https://www.gettyimages.ae/detail/news-photo/blackshirts-saluting-the-italian-head-of-the-government-news-photo/141555611?adppopup=true>.



Figure 5. Statue of Mussolini in front of the entrance of the Littoriale Stadium which stood until the fall of facism. The statue exudes strength and determination and represents the power of the fascist regime.⁴³

When the stadium finally broke ground Mussolini and King Victor Emmanuel III visited to celebrate the laying of the first foundation stone of the Littoriale. During that visit Mussolini came to town on a white horse and delivered a speech to the military at the stadium (Figure 4). Later there was a statue built that image was immortalized in a statue dedicated to the dictator that stood between 1927 and 1943 in the apse that overlooked the stands (Figure 5).⁴⁴ The speech follows:

To the Armed Forces in the "Littoriale" of Bologna

⁴³ Anderson Anderson, "Equestrian Statue of Benito Mussolini; until the Fall of Fascism, This Statue Was in the Littoriale (Stadio Comunale) in Bologna," Meisterdrucke, April 21, 2024, <https://www.meisterdrucke.uk/fine-art-prints/Anderson-Anderson/1051619/Equestrian-statue-of-Benito-Mussolini%3B-until-the-fall-of-fascism%2C-this-statue-was-in-the-Littoriale-%28Stadio-comunale%29-in-Bologna-%28b-w-p-hoto%29.html>.

⁴⁴ "The History of Dall' Ara Stadium."

On 31 October 1926, Mussolini reviewed all the forces of the Emilia-Romagna Militia, together with representatives of the Army, Navy and Air Force, in the Littoriale packed with more than fifty thousand people. He addressed these words to the soldiers:

Officers, soldiers, sailors! Black Shirts!

Every time the armed forces of the state join ranks in the perfect fusion, in the fraternity of spirits and in the common identity of the goals, the first thought goes to S. M. the King, supreme commander of all armies, all armies, all militias. I wanted the final event of the fourth celebration of the March on Rome to take place in Bologna, which I always consider, as once the quadrivio of Italian Fascism. I also wanted to give a certificate of sympathy to the square, combative, very loyal Bolognese Fascism, animated by a man, Leandro Arpinati, who created with his will and with the will of Fascism this gigantic Littoriale that recommends our generation for all future centuries. This demonstration surpasses in character and its meaning all the previous demonstrations; it is the armed people who give full, enthusiastic, conscious consent to the fascist regime, it is the whole people who are ready to follow me everywhere.

Black Shirts!

The fifth year of the unwavering Fascist Regime begins under the best auspices. In this year Fascism has gained in extension, but above all in depth. It has become, as I wanted it, the civil religion of all Italians who are worthy of the name of Italians. Black Shirts!

Up the muskets! The world sees this forest of bayonets and feel the throbbing of our decisive and invincible hearts.

Once again we can see how Mussolini is using soccer as a way to connect the fascist military with everyday people. He is demonstrating how soccer is a form of the military and how

*people need to take after the players/ military to be tough and strong. It explains how these extensions of the government bleed into the cracks of society.*⁴⁵

Once the stadium officially opened in 1927 it became the most successful stadium in Italy and the envy of other countries, since it was the largest stadium in Europe at the time. By 1932, with almost 1,500 members in the various sports clubs, of which 279 were footballers, '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 just create the Littoriale in Bologna.⁴⁶ Bologna even became the place for the north and the south to meet. There were many new train lines built so fans could travel all across Italy easier to support their favorite teams and the national team. Train fares to Bologna were often half-price in order to encourage Italians of all classes to support the country's most successful club team as a means of combating campanilismo (the pride for one's city) and promoting national solidarity. Bologna, more than any other team, became associated with the Fascist regime through the dopolavoro (after work programs), the institutions of mass leisure, which created promotions to reduce the cost of tickets for party members.⁴⁷

The 1934 World Cup was going to be political from the start. Although bribery is often difficult to prove, several sources conjecture that the selection of Italy as a host nation was corrupt. It seems that FIFA, in a practice that has blighted the organization throughout its history, took bribes from Italy, which wanted to use this event to push its fascist agenda. "As early as 1930, an informal lobbying effort was undertaken by the Secretary for the Italian

⁴⁵ Benito, "Works, Speeches and Writings (1914-1942)."

⁴⁶ Simon Martin, *Football and Fascism: The National Game under Mussolini*, 118.

⁴⁷ Pierre Lanfranchi, "Bologna: The Team That Shook the World! A Football Team in Fascist Italy," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 8 (1991): 340–43.

Football Federation, Giovanni Mauro, on behalf of the fascist government to assure the organization that the Italian government would underwrite any losses incurred during the tournament.⁴⁸ After several meetings with FIFA and eight more meetings later during a conference in Stockholm, on October 9, 1932 Italy was chosen as the host country for the 1934 World Cup. During this time Italy was assigned a budget of 3.5 million lire for the tournament organization – an astonishing amount of money for the time.⁴⁹

As soon as Italy knew they had won the bid to host the World Cup the propaganda started. A confidant of Mussolini, Achille Starace, Secretary of the Fascist Party, better known as the ‘High Priest of ‘The Cult of Il Duce’. He was the creator of the fascist salute as well as the most important piece of propaganda for the World Cup. “ Starace created over 300,000 posters, stamps issued with World Cup images, and even a cigarette brand *Campionato del Mondo*, or World Championship.”⁵⁰ Such as the poster below (Figure 6), which shows an Italian man doing the fascist salute, raised above to demonstrate superiority. On the poster it also puts the FIGC above FIFA to show dominance of the organizations. Lastly the posters were only labeled in Italian so they would not compromise their Italianness with English words. Also the base of the stand which the soccer player is standing on, has exposed metal, which aligns with the fascist architecture.

⁴⁸ Jim Hart, “When The World Cup Rolled Into Fascist Italy In 1934.”

⁴⁹ Matsaridis Apostolos and Vasileos Kaimakamis, “Sport at Fascism’s Disposal: The 1934 Football World Cup as a Case of Ideological Propagation and Political Enforcement,” *Studies in Physical Culture and Tourism* 19, no. 3 (2012): 118.

⁵⁰ Jim Hart, “When The World Cup Rolled Into Fascist Italy In 1934.”



Figure 6. ⁵¹

Along with Mussoli’s investment into new cities and stadiums, he controlled the media, and the creation of one singular national league across Italy also assisted in the popularity of the sport. It was said that between 1924 and 1934 the consumption/ consumerism of sporting magazines expanded massively with a number of weekly and monthly publications complementing la gazzetta dello sport and the Corriere dello sport that sold on average 150,000 copies per day and over 300,000 at the weekend”.⁵² During the World Cup newspapers and Magazines such as the Popolo D’Italia would embellish tiles for example “In the name of Duce, the Azzurri win a new world title” or “That was not a game but a battle”.⁵³ He made sure that every Italian and anyone else in the country was bombarded with fascist iconography every day.

⁵¹ Michael H, “Italy: 1934 World Cup Final Poster,” Pinterest, n.d., <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/132363676528152326/>.

⁵² Simon Martin, *Football and Fascism: The National Game under Mussolini*, 12.

⁵³ Apostolos Matsaridis Vasileos Kaimakamis, “Sport At Fascism’s Disposal: The 1934 Football World Cup As A Case Of Ideological Propagation And Political Enforcement,” *Studies In Physical Culture And Tourism, History And Cultural Aspects Of Sport*, 19, No. 3 (2012): 120.

Fascist architecture was also promoted throughout the World Cup. This happened because of the locations chosen for the games. For example, new stadiums were built or enhanced in places like Rome, Turin, Florence, and Milan, all places where fascism was taking place at a heightened level. One of the most well-known examples of Mussolini's propaganda was when he went down to the ticket office, waited in line with all common Italian people, and bought a ticket to the opening match. When the match started the fans in attendance of the first game saw Mussolini sitting in the royal box (Tribuna d'onore) with the Royal family away from the rest of the fans. Although hypocritical, his big performance helped people buy more tickets to the World Cup opening matches, which were difficult to sell beforehand to the Italian people.

Despite the difficulties to sell tickets there was still a good display of fans who attended the matches, the stadiums were just not as full as described on the radio or newspapers. As tabloids would describe the 1934 World Cup to be sold out at every match. This demonstrates how the World Cup was not as successful as Mussolini intended it to be and how the success of the World Cup ended up relying on a win from the home country. Therefore, attendance issues during the World Cup showed the limits of a fascist society and despite having the resources Mussolini couldn't always force outcomes his way. Problems with attendance to the opening matches of the World Cup were deemed to be because of how the tournament took place across eight stadiums in Italy, dispersed through the north and the South. For example, when Sweden played against Argentina at the Littoriale Stadium only 14,000 people attended the match out of the 50,100 seats available in the stadium, but officials still said the match was full of supporters and sold out. Therefore the Fascist Party did everything in its power to fill the stands.⁵⁴

One of Italy's best known sports broadcasters and tv personality was Niccolò Carosio. He debuted his talent as a broadcaster in 1933, after demonstrating his renowned abilities as an

⁵⁴ Jim Hart, "When The World Cup Rolled Into Fascist Italy In 1934 ."

announcer he was chosen to commentate for the 1934 World Cup. The regime promoted his work especially because of his innovation of creating a new Italian world for soccer based on the English language, which was just one way the Mussolini attempted to make soccer more Italian. For example some of his featured words to adapt the language of calcio was “calcio d’inizio,” or “kick-off”—the beginning of a football match—that had been “Italianized” by the regime and became a defining feature of Italian football.⁵⁵ He also established new Italian words for the positions, rules, and maneuvers through his time commentating. Niccolo Carosio is credited with being able to communicate to the masses and even connect the north and the south because he made it easier for everyone to understand the game of football. This only enforced the regime's tactics because stadiums were able to accommodate the crowds of spectators as well as the commentators and media, and fascist iconography. Especially since approximately 10 years before the March on Rome the illiteracy rate amounted to 35% of the Italian population. So even though newspapers and magazines consumption had gone up most of the population still relied on listening, watching, or seeing posters about the World Cup. In order to demonstrate fascist cinema better the regime used more than 15,000 meters of film to cover the tournament. In a suffering society the use of cinema for all kinds of propaganda brought impressive results, as exemplified by the coverage of the 1934 FIFA World Cup that used more than 15,000 meters of film.⁵⁶ Therefore fascism was always on display to the public eye to demonstrate strength and discipline whatever the reality in the stadiums.

The 1934 World Cup started on May 27 and lasted until June 31st. During this month of intense football matches, the world was able to witness the first World Cup in Europe. “In total

⁵⁵ Wynn, “The Gooooaaaaals of Government: Football as a Political Tool of Fascism and Nazism,” 19.

⁵⁶ Matsaridis Apostolos and Vasileos Kaimakamis, “Sport at Fascism’s Disposal: The 1934 Football World Cup as a Case of Ideological Propagation and Political Enforcement,” 119.

70 goals were made in only 17 matches, 4.11 goals per match”.⁵⁷ One player was sent off during the tournament. For this edition of the World Cup the group phase was removed (until 1950 when it was reintroduced), instead a knockout stage was introduced, meaning whoever lost the match was immediately sent home. “If the match was a tie after regular match time a period of 30 minutes extra time would take place. If the match still wasn’t decided after extra time a rematch would be arranged the following day (penalty shoot-out was not introduced until 1978)”.⁵⁸ Out of the sixteen teams to participate, only four were located outside of Europe. The following countries qualified for the knockout stage round: Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United States.

Italy's first match of the World Cup was played on May 27th against the United States, using a system developed by Pozzo called il metodo. Il metodo used a 2-3-2-3 formation and was based around defense, long balls and striking on the counter.⁵⁹ During the 1930 World Cup the US had made it all the way to the semifinals so the world thought they may provide the home nation with a challenge. This idea was proved to be incorrect as team USA was revamped three months before the tournament and Italy as the tournament favorite was dominant during the match. “During the first match, by the time the US players scored with a shot from 20 yards out in the 57th minute, the Italians had already scored three goals, all of them coming between the 20th and 30th minute. When the match ended with Giuseppe Meazza’s goal in the 90th minute, the Italians had scored another three goals in six minutes”.⁶⁰ Italy not only won the match but

⁵⁷ “World Cup 1934,” FootballHistory.org, n.d., <https://www.footballhistory.org/world-cup/1934-italy.html>.

⁵⁸ “World Cup 1934.”

⁵⁹ Sam Lopresti, “Italy World Cup Rewind: 1934 Final Victory Vs. Czechoslovakia,” Bleacher Report, January 17, 2014, <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/1924518-italy-world-cup-rewind-the-first-title-1934-final-vs-czechoslovakia>.

⁶⁰ Ed Farnsworth, “The US and the 1934 World Cup,” *The Philly Soccer Page*, March 26, 2014, <https://phillysoccerpage.net/2014/03/26/the-us-and-the-1934-world-cup/>.

dominated as the game ended 7-1, and Angelo Schiavo scored a hat trick (three goals in one match). Therefore Italy was making its way through the tournament and had secured a spot in the quarter finals. Other notable games during this stage was Brazil losing to Spain 3-1 and Germany beating Belgium 5-2.

Italy's quarterfinal match took place on May 31st and was described to be one of the most physical and vicious matches in history as the referee Louis Baert, 'let many fouls go unpunished'.⁶¹ During the first thirty minutes of the match it was a deadlock until a mistake by the Italian goalkeeper, Combi, in the 31st minute, as the ball went past him and the Spanish forward Luis Regueiro scored the first goal of the match. After halftime the Italian national team entered the pitch, fired up and determined to win, the Spanish team appeared to be somewhat complacent, and the Italians were able to score immediately from the Spanish national team's lack of composure. "The Spanish players protested, claiming Schiavo had impeded Zamora from getting to the ball. The protests were ignored and the goal stood".⁶² The rest of the regulation time of 90 minutes was a nail-biter but neither side was able to make a breakthrough therefore the game went into overtime. Despite both teams best effort the game ended 1-1, the game ended without a winner, a rematch would be played the next day. This was the first and last match in FIFA's history to be replayed. The rematch took place on June 1st at the same location, the Berta Stadium in Florence, and had the same devoted fans but a Swiss referee, Rene Mercet, took over (rumors spread that this only happened because Mussolini had dinner with him the night before, some implied that some form of bribery occurred that night) and both coaches made several changes to their lineups from the day before. The Italian summer heat was no match for the players and despite having fresh legs the unbearable humidity made players

⁶¹ Clemente Angelo Lisi, *A History Of The World Cup 1930-2006* (Scarecrow Press, Inc., N.D.).

⁶² Clemente Angelo Lisi, 28.

collapse from exhaustion left and right. The Italian national team took advantage of this and played with the aggression needed to fit a military squadron. Their tactics paid off as in the 12th minute of the match Italian player Meazza was able to score a header, the only goal of the match. The Spanish players tried to plead with the referee, saying the goal was offside but Mercet didn't want to hear it and allowed the goal. Despite Italy's best efforts to keep the Spanish out of the match, they scored on two different occasions, both times the goals were taken back and claimed offside. In this thrilling match Italy ended up winning 1-0, with some hard work, luck, and the tired legs of Spain. After the match Mercet's decisions and rulings in the game were questioned and the Swiss Football Federation put him on suspension for a 'horrible' performance. The Italians would be playing in the next round against Austria, who had qualified the day before winning against Hungary 2-1.

As heavy rain poured down on the fans at San Siro the Italian national team prepared to play against their northern neighbors Austria. On June 3rd in front of 60,000 fans the Austrians struggled against the fast paced Italians when they counter-attacked, skipping the midfield, relying on the attack. Whereas the Wunderteam (Austrian national team) focused on passing, which will always put a team at a disadvantage in the rain. The Italians were able to score in the 19th minute after Enrique Guaita, score after the Austrian goalkeeper made a mistake and bobbled the ball and let it go in the the 18 yard box, when the Italian striker Schiavo powerfully shot the ball. Austria tried to push on but were unable to even get a shot on goal in the first half. In the second half of the game, Austria came back energized and took shot after shot but were unable to produce anything that was worthy of winning the match. The Azzurri (nickname for the Italian team) were able to hold off the Wunderteam, winning the match 1-0, destroying the golden era of Austrian domination. The other semi final match was also played on June 3rd

which featured Germany and Czechoslovakia, two tournament favorites battling against each other for a spot in the final. It was an exciting match, as soon as Czechoslovakia took the lead Germany followed shortly behind in the 50th minute of the game. Then again Germany scored but only kept the lead for a few minutes as Czechoslovakia tied the match in the 60th minute after a rebounded shot from a freekick. Czechoslovakia closed the match in the 81st minute when the Czechoslovakian forward, Nejedly scored his third goal of the match. Therefore Italy and Czechoslovakia would face each other for the final, taking place in Rome at the Stadio Nazionale PNF on June 10th.

On the final day of the World Cup Mussolini arrived at the stadium with representatives from Germany and Czechoslovakia. Although it may not have been in good spirit since Mussolini was infuriated with Czechoslovakia since they had decided to align with the Soviet Union. Therefore the final was more than just demonstrating the strengths of fascism it was a showing of dominance against the other political forms, specifically communism. Throughout the 1934 World Cup, there was a feeling that it was, win or die for the Italian players. Except it was not just a feeling but instructions from Mussolini, win or die. Pozzo, the head coach even said to the players, "If they can die for Italy, they can play for Italy".⁶³ One interpretation of this meant that if the Azzurri did lose the World Cup on home soil they would be conscripted into military service. Therefore the Italians started the match using an offensive approach relying on their power and stamina to break away at the Czechoslovakian defense. However, the teams were evenly matched until in the 70th minute when Czechoslovakia's skill and artistry proved to pay off when they scored from a corner kick. This lead did not last long, in the 80th minute the Azzurri scored when Guaita faked a shot with his left after going through the entire defense.

⁶³ "From the Vault: England and Italy Do Battle at Highbury in 1934," *The Guardian* (blog), November 12, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/blog/2008/nov/12/from-the-vault-england-italy-1934>.

This goal put the teams back at an even playing field since the game was again tied. Everyone in the stadium thought the game was going to go into extra time, until another goal was scored in the 95th minute. With an amazing shot, just falling under the crossbar from the Italian attacker, Schiavo. The stadium erupted into cheers as they all knew Italy had just won the second edition of the World Cup on home soil. Despite the hard work of the Czechoslovakia national team and only a few minutes to respond they were only able to score another goal. Therefore they did not do enough to send the game into extra time. The Italians won against Czechoslovakia 2-1. Immediately after the win, Mussolini had organizers play the fascist anthem, the Giovinezza, then when presenting the Jules Rimiet trophy he also presented another trophy six times larger than the original, called the Coppa del Duce (Figure 7 and 8). Also awarded to the Italian national team players from Mussolini was 17,000 dollars each.⁶⁴ After the ceremony Mussolini took his players to the Piazza Venezia, still in their uniforms, Pozzo hoisted above on his players shoulders, the Italian national team was celebrated as heroes of the nation with the Italian people by their side.

⁶⁴ Clemente Angelo Lisi, *A History of the World Cup 1930-2006*, 31.



Figure 7. June 10th, 1934: Mussolini giving The Cup to The Italian Team: Stadio de partiti, Rome. The Italian dictator Benito Mussolini gave the Jules Rimet Trophy to the Italian players after their victory at the Wold Cup.⁶⁵



Figure 8. The Italian national team after winning the 1934 World Cup with the Coppa del Duce Trophy.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ "Mussolini Giving The Cup to The Italian Team," Gettyimages, n.d., <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/stadio-de-partito-rome-the-italian-dictator-benito-news-photo/104404425?adppopup=true>.

⁶⁶ Jack Dennison, "Football and Fascism: The 1934 World Cup," *Golden Generations* (blog), January 20, 2013, <https://goldengenerations.wordpress.com/2013/01/20/football-and-fascism-the-1934-world-cup/>.

CHAPTER 3: The Aftermath

After the success of the World Cup there was nothing that could alter the success of Italy and the fascist government. Once again to reiterate and emphasize what it meant for Italy to win the World Cup; the success of the team demonstrated the strength and prosperity of Mussolini's direct rule and his fascist government to the world. Therefore with the success of the Italian national team, they were ready to prove their success time and time again, whether it was on the soccer field or in foreign policy. Before the Italian national team played their next match after winning the World Cup all Italian athletes were gathered in Rome to hear the praise of Mussolini for their dedication to the fascist government. The speech is called 'To the Athletes of Italy' (28 October 1934), and his words follow as:

Today the XII anniversary of the Revolution of the Black Shirts, one of the most decisive events in the history of Italy and Europe, you athletes, you have had the well-deserved honor of inaugurating one of the most beautiful streets in Rome and therefore in the world. (Loud applause.)

Those who saw you parade had the profound and almost plastic impression of the new race that Fascism is manfully shaping and tempering for each competition. (Thunderous applause.)

You athletes from all over Italy have particular duties. You must be tenacious, chivalrous, daring. Remember that when you fight beyond borders, the honor and sporting prestige of the Nation is entrusted to your muscles and above all to your spirit. (Very vibrant applause).

You must therefore put all your energy, all your will to achieve supremacy in all the trials of earth, sea and sky. (Ovations).

Black Shirts!

*In this atmosphere of such thrilling and ardent enthusiasm of all the Italian people, we are moving towards the new year of the fascist Revolution which continues, since it must and will achieve its goals more and more fully: social justice for the people, ever greater power high for the country.*⁶⁷

Through this speech we are able to analyze Mussolini's thoughts about how athletes and sports in Italy have a higher purpose than just being a game. Mussolini saw these people as a direct link to his purposes of creating a new Italian man as well as being the superior race around the world. Which is a different ideal of Mussolini, since society often thinks that Mussolini didn't have any interest in race. Therefore in these moments, specifically in this speech, demonstrates how Mussolini was often more aligned with Hitler than we think. We can also see what his expectations are for the Italian people, for example to put all your energy into the fascist revolution or to be chivalrous and daring. This is not something that came as a shock for the Italian people as in the transcript we can see that Mussolini is interrupted with applause several times. This is just one speech that honors the fascist people of Italy and in several other speeches we can observe Mussolini using the same type of language or the same tendencies from the crowds throughout his time as ruler of Italy. This speech was used to show Mussolini's support to the athletes of Italy, especially since the football team was receiving controversy (for their aggression, bribery of officials, and the fact that England and Uruguay declined to be apart of the tournament) around the world after their crushing win against Czechoslovakia during the World Cup final.

⁶⁷ Benito, "Works, Speeches and Writings (1914-1942)."

Throughout the months after winning the World Cup other countries denounced the win, stating that the Italians bribed referees, played too aggressively, or did not play the best team in Europe, England, since the nation opted out of the tournament. Five months later a friendly match was scheduled in England. It was said on November 14th, that this game was the actual World Cup final and no other games mattered. Therefore the match was emotionally and politically charged from the beginning. The match was going to be a theater of international war since both sides were gunning for the win to show international domination. Even the media fed into this as an English journalist published a photo of the Italian team with stereotypical mustaches and Italian Broadcaster, Niccolo Carosi was a self described 'English hater'. Before the match started it was determined that 61,000 fans were packed into Highbury to watch the match in the pouring rain.⁶⁸ "The match was a brutally intense encounter, so violent that it prompted widespread debate about whether England should withdraw from international football altogether. England won, but it was the perceived dirty play of the Italians that made the headlines".⁶⁹ The game was not a game, but a battle to the end. England ended up winning the match 3-2, with the Italians drawing up the Fascist salute at the end. Later that night it was reported that several of the English team were injured and would not return to play for a while. "Hapgood, the captain, had a bone in his nose broken; Brook had to have his left arm X-rayed last night; Bowden had a damaged ankle, and Drake, the center forward, had one leg severely hurt. One of the English players, unable to emulate the diplomacy of his Captain, said: "It was not a game of football, it was a battle and Italy could have done better if they paid attention to the ball and less to the man".⁷⁰

⁶⁸ John Foot, "Forza Italia," *The Guardian*, February 19, 2005.

⁶⁹ "From the Vault: England and Italy Do Battle at Highbury in 1934."

⁷⁰ "From the Vault: England and Italy Do Battle at Highbury in 1934."

Yet despite the defeat, Italy continued their domination of international football at the 1938 World Cup, this time taking place in France. Through the tournament there were several protests against fascism, especially since Mussolini had sided with Franco's fascist Spain. With extra political turmoil hanging over the player's heads they did not perform up to standard and lost the opening game. Some people think they lost due to the outside coaching and pressure from Mussolini and his sons.⁷¹ This did not end up fazing the team since they won the rest of their matches, winning the 1938 World Cup. On June 29th 1938 Mussolini and the president of CONI received the Italian national team as their guest and Mussolini welcomed them with a speech stating,

“The result obtained in the competition is the direct consequence of the harmonious fusion of the spiritual, technical and organizational qualities indispensable in a team sport, a fusion obtained with method and tenacity by the Federation itself...”⁷²

Here Mussolini is praising the team to the highest of standards for being great examples of fascism through their spirit, strength and teamwork, and thinks they should be heroes and examples for the rest of the country. Therefore with such high praise for the team during their third consecutive win at a major tournament we can only imagine what he said to the team after their first World Championship.

⁷¹ Simon Martin, *Football and Fascism: The National Game under Mussolini*, 182.

⁷² Benito, “Works, Speeches and Writings (1914-1942).”

CONCLUSION

Mussolini used football as a way to influence all the people of Italy and the rest of the world. The 1934 World Cup has been identified as an event where the men's Italian national football team was able to transcend borders to represent fascist Italy. The players of this football team were specifically able to help the success of the nation by their contributions in winning the entire tournament. Even though their win received backlash it was a way to promote the country's unity and strength. Therefore the 1934 World Cup became one of the most recognizable spectacles for the attempted mobilization of mass media, interest, and support. This included various ways of using propaganda to promote the regime, such as, relocation into rural areas to create suburbia around stadiums, fascist architecture, and the promotion of education through militarization. All of these examples were used by the regime to legitimize its policies and rule. Although some forms of propaganda did not work as well as others, people were able to see these shortcomings because Mussolini could not force an outcome. Therefore demonstrating the cracks of the fascist government. This idea is demonstrated through several occasions during the lead up and the 1934 World Cup itself. For example, the stadiums were half filled on several occasions, due to a lack of foreign involvement and the consumption of tickets. Also, despite winning the entire tournament and demonstrating the strength of fascism, the 1934 World Cup is associated with bribery and a lack of fair play by the Italians.

The best way to understand how fascism was able to last for nearly three decades was the swift action of Mussolini to mobilize fascism throughout the nation before the Socialist, Catholics, or any other political or religious group could. The ability of Mussolini to implement fascism throughout the country in a quick manner allowed him to take over sporting institutions such as CONI and the football federation to integrate fascist ideologies in sports. Mussolini also

enforced domestic policies to unify the north and the south in order to nationalize the country. If this didn't happen it's possible that Italy could still be divided by the north and the south without ever fully unifying. Even to this day traditional rivalries between the north and the south endure. Therefore Mussolini was able to blend tradition and innovation for the entire country and promote an image of strength, mysticism, and superiority. This included Mussolini's vision of the new man, which meant that through fascism a man would have the power of an ancient Roman warrior as part of a superior race. He was able to develop this idea by growing his military and afterwork programs that focused on politics and sports.

The 1934 World Cup was politically charged and helped promote Mussolini's image around the world. His policies and fascist ideologies were on display everywhere a person turned for the entire world. With nowhere to escape since there were thousands of posters, commercials, and flags at every corner. These were all symbols of fascism that emphasized the physical regeneration of Italy, a nation built off the strength and unity of the new man, another way Mussolini was able to impose an identity for the regime. Which have still impacted the way the national team is seen today. Using the style based on Pozzo's metodo, the legacy of the 1934 Italian national team can be seen in catenaccio. "The Italian catenaccio or 'door-bolt' strategy, mastered by Milan Coach Nereo Rocco, was centered on a rigid center of defense that would lock out the opposing team as players battled man- for- man across the pitch".⁷³ This style has the same emphasis on defense, and one- on- one battles, necessary to win the match with a level of passion that could be seen as a nationalizing tactic.

⁷³ Sam McPhail, "Total Eclipse: How John Cruff's Philosophy Shaped Modern Football," March 23, 2024, 20.

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