

***Jamón, Tortilla y Cola-Cao: National Identity and the Spanish Press Coverage of
the Athens 2004 Olympic Games***

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Introduction

The Olympic Games and other sports events such as the FIFA World Cup are primarily consumed, on a global scale, through the mass media. The interdependent relationship between the Olympic Movement and the media, and more fundamentally between sport and the media, has been identified as forming a 'media sport complex' (Rowe, 2003). As part of this relationship, the media represents and interprets sports, giving meaning to events that directly contribute to the definition of the role of sports in society. Through its sports coverage, the media affects the construction of individual and collective identities.

Various studies have analysed the media coverage of the Olympic Games, focusing on diverse aspects such as the representation of the 'host' through the television coverage of the Olympic opening and closing ceremonies (Moragas et al., 1995; Rivenburgh, 2004; Capranica and Aversa, 2003) and the international press (Real, 1986; Ladrón et al., 1995; Puijk, 1997; Vincent et al., 2003).

This study aims to contribute to the discourse surrounding the interpretation of sporting texts by providing an in-depth analysis of the Spanish press coverage of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games. The main research objective was to determine how the Spanish print media, as part of the media sport complex, exercised their role as Olympic

‘gatekeepers’ and effectively filtered their coverage by choosing the ‘lens’ through which the Spanish public would see the Games.

The study included five major Spanish daily newspapers three of which were considered informational ‘news’ papers – *El País*, *La Vanguardia* and *La Razón* – and two were ‘sports’ papers – *Marca* and *El Mundo Deportivo*. When selecting the newspapers an effort was made to choose sources that would represent press readership and the various social and political positions that exist in the mainstream Spanish press¹. The texts were analysed using a qualitative approach involving the construction of semantic fields based on the issues of national identity, gender representation, universal themes of Olympism, security, doping, the image of the host city, and the evaluation of the Games as a sporting event. The sample was analysed from the day after the opening ceremony (August 14th) to the day after the closing ceremony (August 30th).

The Olympic Games as a media event

The summer Olympic Games, along with the FIFA World Cups have been defined as mega-events primarily due to the international media coverage they receive (Dayan and Katz, 1992; Roche, 2000). With the Athens Games being covered in 220 countries on over 300 television channels for more than 35,000 hours, the Olympics have become a premium media event.

As a premium event, the Games receive enormous media revenue with NBC, for example, paying US\$ 2.2bn to obtain exclusive U.S. rights for 2010 and 2012. While this level of financial investment enables organizers to meet some of the costs of the

¹ The daily readership of *Marca* was 2.5m, *El País* 2.2m, *La Vanguardia* 0.8m, *El Mundo Deportivo* 0.6m and *La Razón* 0.4m (EMG, 2005).

Games and maintain the wider Olympic Movement, it also creates an interdependent relationship between the media and sport that continues to accelerate to the point that it has been labelled a complex.

The media sport complex is the combination of all organizations, processes, texts and products that form the culture of modern sport and establish it as a 'socio-cultural institution closely connected to the politics of everyday life' (Rowe, 2003: 6). In this complex, the media plays the key role of communicating sports contents to audiences in a variety of formats or 'products', which provide exposure for sports organizations and their sponsors, as well as the means for advertisers to reach target audiences. It is a relationship that has become so ingrained, and media and sport have become such close bedfellows, that it has now become difficult to separate their impact on one other (Wenner, 1998; Boyle and Haynes, 2000).

The mediation of a sporting event such as the Olympic Games can drastically alter audience perception of its basic meanings and values. Indeed, MacAloon (1989) highlighted television's inability to reproduce the rich festival atmosphere of the Olympics, which leaves viewers without a sense of this key component.

The power of the media to act as 'gatekeepers', by controlling the flow of sporting information to the public, often gives them a dominant position over sports organizations in the media sport complex. The media do not merely transmit sports; they may actively transform them. The media has adopted a position in which it can define the social and political position of sport in society, as well as reinforce and normalize attitudes and values existing in other spheres of life (Boyle and Haynes, 2000; Pedersen, 2002).

According to Roche, sport is one of the only arenas where 'collective identities, from the local to the national, can be publicly symbolized and emotionally expressed' (Roche, 2004: 169). Sport can be seen as a quasi-religious institution that provides experiences of sacredness and transcendence, communal rituals and collective drama (Roche, 2000). Many authors have questioned whether there is any cultural force to compare with sport in terms of its ability to invent, reinforce or reshape national identities (Boyle and Haynes, 2000; Roche, 2004).

Indeed, sporting performances are often seen as a reflection of a team's fans or a nation (Blain et al., 1993; Boyle and Haynes, 2000; Billings and Eastman, 2002). Therefore, what the media chooses to report (or not to report) and how events are interpreted can have an important impact on the construction of individual and collective identities, particularly national identities in the case of international sporting events such as the Olympic Games. When studied in the proper context, analysis of sport media texts can provide useful insights into these impacts. In general, critical analysis of content enables investigation into how the sports media create and reinforce social ideologies and mythologies regarding nation, race and gender (Rowe, 2004; Wenner, 1998).

Spanish national identity and sport in the press

In Crolley and Hand's (2002) comparative study of the European press coverage of the 1996 European football championships and the 1998 FIFA World Cup, analysis was undertaken as to how the Spanish press represented and reproduced national identity, or in some cases, the *lack* of a coherent Spanish national identity in the context of rising nationalism in the 'regions' (especially the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia).

A series of defining characteristics were developed that enable an understanding of the complex interplay between historical interpretations of Spanish identity, the role of the national football team (*la selección*) in Spanish society and its representation by the press. These characteristics can be applied to the Spanish press coverage of the Spanish Olympic team.

The national team was identified as typically relying on *furia* to win games, with a combination of passion, commitment, physical prowess and courage. While *furia* can be seen as a positive trait, it is not necessarily the desired self-image of a new, democratic Spain. With the democratic transition and accession to the European Community in 1986, Spain faced the project of constructing an identity apart from stereotypical associations with flamenco, bullfighting, siestas and *mañana* (Moragas et al., 1995).

Three sporting and cultural events held in 1992 played a key role in dispelling these myths: the Expo in Seville; Madrid as the European City of Culture; and perhaps most importantly, the Barcelona Olympic Games. The latter not only contributed to the construction of a transformed Spanish national identity, but also communicated the diversity and re-emergence of national identities within the Spanish state (Kennett and Moragas, 2006).

Crolley and Hand (2002) identified a desire among the Spanish press for the adoption of a more Europeanised image by the national football team, a more sophisticated, technically advanced style of play that reflected progress and development in the nation as a whole. However, while the national team strived for 'Europeanisation', they typically had to resort to *furia* when all else failed, resulting in the reinforcement of a lack of self-belief when the nation stepped onto the international sporting stage:

the high optimism in the early stages of tournaments versus the fatalistic negativity when things begin to go wrong on the field; the apparent self-belief versus the inevitable and predictable disappointment; the pride in a forward-thinking nation which looks to Europe for its role models versus an inferiority complex which borders on a paranoia that it might be considered backward by outsiders (Crolley and Hand, 2002: 114)

When reporting on the Spanish national team, Crolley and Hand (ibid) highlight various shifting discourses among the press. The first relates to the oscillation between *optimismo*, literally optimism, and *fatalismo* or fatalistic predetermination. Before major tournaments the press built the national team up as potential champions and then explained their defeats through a combination of *mala suerte* or bad luck, and *victimismo*, which portrayed the team as the often-undeserving victims of bad refereeing decisions.

Generally, the optimistic perspective was characterised by an inclusive discourse, where the press use language ('we', 'us') that brings the reader close to the national team and fosters unity. This may also be evident when there is a possibility that the team has been unfairly treated, converting the nation as a whole into victims. When the team plays loses and badly, an exclusionary discourse is often adopted, which uses language ('they', 'them') that serves to distance the press and the readers from the team.

Moreover, Spanish newspapers are inherently political, and Crolley and Hand (ibid) identified three main discourses that highlight differences in perspective regarding the question of Spanish national identity. Firstly, the *unitario* discourse promotes the notion of a single, centralised Spanish national identity (e.g. *La Razón*). Secondly, the *diferencial* discourse acknowledges differences between nations/regions within Spain, as is the status of Spain as a single administrative political unit (e.g. *El*

País, La Vanguardia). Thirdly, the *disjuntivo* discourse goes further to claim that Spain consists of separate nations (e.g. ‘regional’ press).

In terms of readership, the sports press is a powerful media in Spain. *Marca* was not only the most read sports newspaper, but also had a larger readership than any of the ‘news’ papers with more than 2.5 million readers every day. *Marca* is published in Madrid and has traditionally had a strong affiliation with the Madrid-based football teams, in particular Real Madrid. Meanwhile, *El Mundo Deportivo* is published in Barcelona and maintains a strong affiliation with the Catalan sports teams, in particular FC Barcelona. Indeed, these two sports papers reflect a clear sporting, but also wider cultural, political and ideological rivalry between centrist Spain and Catalonia.

Noble universalism and base partisanship: the Athens 2004 Olympic Games seen through the national lens

The results of the analysis of the Spanish press coverage of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games reflect what Rowe (2003) described as a split discourse and ‘interplay of tensions between “noble” universalism and “base” partisanship’. The base partisanship was shared by all of the newspapers in their predominantly nationalist coverage of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games, which was particularly evident in the reporting of the opening and closing ceremonies, as well as in the contrasting interpretations of the Spanish team’s performance from the first to the second week of competition.

While ‘noble’ themes were dealt with, such as Olympism and its modern and ancient histories, the central universal theme was the ‘ignoble’ controversy of doping

and its threat not just to the Athens Games but also to the Olympic Movement and sport as a whole.

All of the newspapers analysed reported the Athens 2004 Olympic through a national lens, although with varying degrees of intensity that reflected their main editorial lines and political sympathies. The build-up to the Games, their inauguration, celebration and closure were framed in the Spanish, and occasionally Catalan (in the case of the Barcelona-based newspapers) national context. The success of the national team became the focal point of discussion and the athletes were subjected to intense scrutiny.

With its conservative right-of-centre perspective, *La Razón*, was the most extreme in terms of the Spanish nationalist orientation of its coverage. *Marca* had a clear national focus but within a sporting rather than political context. *El País* toed the national line, but also focused on the more universal aspects of the Olympic Games such as the threat of doping to sport and the Olympic Movement. The Barcelona-based newspaper *La Vanguardia* covered the Games through the Spanish national lens, but the Spain that was represented was decentralised, with attention drawn to the performance of the regions, and in certain cases, nations within the Spanish state (e.g. the Basque Country and Catalonia). *El Mundo Deportivo* mirrored the predominantly sports-based coverage of *Marca*, but with more focus on Catalan athletes.

The ceremonies: spectacle, ritual and partisanship

The opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympic Games provide the media with rich contents in terms of news, entertainment, spectacle and ritual (MacAloon, 1989). They also produced a clear example of Rowe's (2003) split discourse between

universalism and partisanship. The contents and structure of the ceremonies play on the universal symbolic and semantic values of the Olympic Movement through ritualistic reproduction. The raising of the flag, signing of the Olympic anthem, declaration of oaths, lighting of the cauldron create a universal context which the sporting teams of nation states parade into.

The Spanish press, however, paid relatively little attention to the universal discourse of Olympism. While the magnitude and spectacular nature of the Games was emphasised as, ‘The grand Olympic challenge’ (*El País*, 14/08/04: 1), and ‘the most multitudinous Games in history’ (*La Razón*, 14/08/04: 1), the opening ceremony was described as taking place under the shadow of the doping scandal involving the Greek athletes Kenteris and Thanou, as well as fears over security:

The Olympic Games got going in Athens yesterday, the cradle of the Olympic Movement, loaded with symbolism and with two challenges ahead: the security, more threatening than ever after 11 September, and doping, the large blemish on sport. (*El País*, 14/08/05: 1).

The sporting and wider cultural and historic contents of the ceremonies had to struggle for the headlines with stories involving corruption and fear over the preparedness of the Greek organisers. This was reflected in all of the Spanish newspapers analysed and summarised most succinctly in a cartoon from *El País*, entitled ‘New Olympism’. The image was of a crowded podium and the caption read ‘Podium with 3 medallists, 24 security guards and 48 anti-doping doctors’(14/08/05).

Indeed, the ‘macro-stories’ of the Athens Games were doping and, to a lesser extent as the Games progressed without major incident, security and the ability of the Greek nation to successfully organise the Games. Immediately after the opening ceremony, the key to the success of the Athens Games was judged by the Spanish to be decided in the battle against doping:

The Games of Barcelona'92 distinguished themselves because they were a party; Atlanta'96 because they were a business; Sydney 2000, the spectacle in great decoration. Athens 2004 struggles to be the cleanest doping Games ever. But overall, the Games inaugurated yesterday in the Greek capital, in a brilliant ceremony, will be those of security. (*La Vanguardia*, 14/08/04: 1).

Indeed, the Kenteris-Thanou saga provided off-the-field interest for the Spanish press that evolved like a soap opera, providing dramatic twists and a mythological test for the IOC President, who was to become the hero in this tragic-comic episode:

His (President Rogge) decision in the Kenteris case will determine his credibility as a leader. If he follows his promises, he will be converted into the undeniable leader of sport. If he takes the shady deal, doping will have ultimately won the battle. (*El País*, 14/08/04: 47).

The more partisan interest of the Spanish press in the opening ceremony came with the analysis of the athletes' parade and, more importantly for the sports journalists, the imminent start of the athletic competition. The athletes' parade was criticised by certain elements of the Spanish press, for example the more conservative newspaper *La Razón* stating that it degenerated into a 'fashion catwalk' that ignored the importance of traditional rituals and values (14/08/04).

Speculation began immediately as to Spain's medal chances. This was particularly evident in the two sports newspapers, *Marca* and *El Mundo Deportivo*. These papers were impatient to leave the stuffy ritual and ceremony behind and get on with the sporting action. The director of *El Mundo Deportivo* stated in an editorial piece that "Today, at last, the athletes will leave behind their ties and handbags, and don their real work clothes... today the good stuff starts" (*El Mundo Deportivo*, 14/08/04: 2).

What could only be described as 'gold fever' on the part of the sports journalists began as pressure mounted on the Spanish athletes to deliver medals early. *Marca* stated

that the hunt for gold was on and *La Razón* declared quickly that the Spanish team was the best in history.

The national angle was sought at every opportunity, with the ceremony itself being compared on several occasions to Barcelona'92 and numerous references were made to Santiago Calatrava, the Valencian architect of the Olympic Stadium and other venues. *La Razón* followed its traditionally conservative editorial line by focusing on the presence of Doña Sofía, Queen of Spain at the ceremony and followed the movements of other members of the Spanish royal family throughout the Games.

Indeed, an Olympic athlete writing for *La Razón* (14/08/04: 59) fuelled national sentiment in an article entitled '*Jamón, tortilla y cola-caó*' (ham, omelette and a Spanish brand of milkshake), three stereotypically Spanish foods, which the athletes were apparently relieved to find at an official reception at the team's headquarters in Athens. A sense of nostalgia was communicated, a parochial craving for the homeland by 'our' athletes as they prepared to do battle on the sports fields of Athens. This article, perhaps better than any other, highlighted the national lens through which the Olympic Games were covered by the press.

However, sentimentalism and nostalgia among the press soon disappeared as the sporting competition began and a tale of two Spanish teams unravelled.

A tale of two teams: *optimismo* and *fatalismo*

Although the analysis of the press coverage during the two weeks of sporting competition revealed a mix of information-based descriptive contents and opinion-based articles on the more universal aspects of the Games, the most frequently discussed topic was the performance of the Spanish team. A stark contrast was evident between the

coverage of the first and second weeks of competition as the press proceeded to construct very different identities for the Spanish national team. The press reports began with an inclusive, optimistic discourse around the opening ceremony. This moved to an exclusionary, pessimistic discourse in the first week of competition. As the sporting performances of the Spanish team improved during the second week, a further shift occurred to an inclusive, celebratory discourse that was tinged with uncertainty. The press coverage of the closing ceremony was marked by a return to a distant, exclusionary discourse that involved critical reflection and evaluation.

After the optimism of the days building up to the opening ceremony, the first week of sporting competition and the absence of Spanish medals was reported in the Spanish press through an exclusionary discourse, as the journalists distanced themselves from the athletes. Instead of using collective language that reflected support, unity and solidarity with the team, the reader was distanced from the events. Headlines in *El País* (18/08/04: 44) such as ‘The emotion of failure’, and ‘Spanish disappointment, intact’ accompanied others that declared ‘Spanish swimming is sunk’, and ‘Greece drowns Spain’ (in waterpolo) (ibid: 37: 44). *Marca* watched as ‘Spain suffers’ and had ‘A bad day at the office’, (15/08/04: 31) and was clearly unsatisfied with explanations for the perceived under-performance, which it dismissed as ‘Olympic excuses’ (16/08/05: 34). While *Marca* declared ‘We need medals’, the ‘we’ seemed to refer to the spectators (and journalists) as the pressure mounted on the athletes to deliver. A headline from *La Razón* reflected this distant discourse as it stated simply ‘They are failing’ (18/08/04: 45).

During this first week of coverage there was also evidence of *fatalismo*, as reasons for the medal drought were sought. The press felt strongly that history was repeating

itself and that Spain was in some way destined to walk down the same path of underachievement on the international sporting stage. *El Mundo Deportivo* reinforced this as ‘The Olympic curse’, suggesting a mix of *fatalismo*, *mala suerte* and to some extent *victimismo*. Reasons for perceived failure were sought in external, mystical forces acting against the Spanish team that they were powerless to alter.

Apart from embarrassments in the swimming, waterpolo, tennis, the biggest disappointments were yet to come. The Spanish press clearly placed emphasis on the need to win medals, but to win certain medals, which were perceived to have a higher value than others. This was the case for the men’s football, basketball and handball competitions.

The Spanish press, in particular *Marca* and *El Mundo Deportivo*, held out great hope for gold in the basketball competition as they built up the team in the preliminary stages and praised their performances. Victories against Argentina, Italy, Serbia and China were met with headlines such as ‘You guys are huge’ (*Marca*, 18/08/04: 1), ‘Unstoppable’ (*El Mundo Deportivo*, 21/08/04: 2), “Spain knocks down the Great Wall of China” (*Marca*, 17/08/04: 2). At the same time the Spanish press seemed to take great pleasure in ridiculing the US team as they struggled to qualify for the knockout phase of the competition.

When Spain drew the US in the quarterfinals, the press declared that the roles had been reversed and that Spain was now the ‘Dream Team’. Spain’s subsequent defeat by the US was received bitterly in the press as a “Shattered dream” (*El Mundo Deportivo*, 27/08/04: 2) and was blamed on controversial refereeing. The press described how the mood in the dressing room after the game shifted from disappointment to indignation. The feeling of *victimismo* was communicated through the press in the following days

with interviews with fuming players and coaches combined with articles on how Spain were the best team in the tournament and had been robbed of the medal they deserved.

The elimination of the men's handball team by Germany in the quarterfinals on penalties was met with a similar mix of *victimismo* and *fatalismo*, summarised by an article in *El Mundo Deportivo* that stated 'We played better than ever and we lost like always. When it appeared to be done and dusted [...] the old saying that has tormented the history of Spanish sport deepened and strengthened its roothold.' (25/08/04: 7).

As the men's field hockey team lost the bronze medal play-off to Germany in overtime to what was described as a 'controversial' golden goal, the indignation in the press had reached a crescendo as none of the male teams delivered a medal.

Criticism of certain elements of the Spanish team by the press did not stop at their inability to win medals. The Spanish tennis players, among the favourites to win medals, were knocked out early in the competition and received criticism regarding their lack of desire to represent their country. These athletes were accused of caring more about their professional and specifically commercial interests in sport.

From celebration to introspection

As the medal drought ended for the Spanish team, their representation in the press changed dramatically. After the pessimistic, fatalistic articles of the first week of sporting competition, the press had something to celebrate. When the first Spanish gold medal was won on August 23, the sigh of relief was almost audible through the lead headlines of certain newspapers, such as 'At last, gold' (*La Razón*, 24/08/04) and 'Day of gold' (*Marca*, 24/08/04).

The stories and headlines that ran as more Spanish medals were won during the following days, constituted a u-turn in the team's representation by the press as the journalists returned to a positive, inclusive discourse. Suddenly the Spanish team beat 'To the rhythm of medals' as victories came on the "Triumphant track" and athletes were heralded for their "Olympic patriotism" (headlines from *La Vanguardia*, 25/08/04). 'New winds' blew and 'Spain (was) at full sail' on a "Sea of medals" (*Marca*, 20/08/04; *La Razón*, 22/08/04). From the press' perspective, the medal rate was now respectable, and the journalists were optimistic that more would come.

The language of failure and disappointment was replaced with that of triumph and success as gold fever took over. However, the Spanish press found themselves lauding unexpected heroes in relatively little-known individual sports. As the team sports failed to win medals, the search for possible medallists became increasingly desperate, and the celebration of unknown athletes more challenging for the press. Certain journalists stated that they were having to settle for second best, with one article in *La Razón* arguing that some medals were worth more than others and that interest levels in the Olympic Games would remain the same if certain sports were eliminated from the programme. According to the journalist in question, during the second week of the Games the Spanish team had been winning 'consolidation medals...(and)...Olympic diplomas'.

Another journalist in *Marca* (25/08/04) stated in an article championing football over the Olympic Games entitled 'Leave football alone', that as the Spanish athletes won medals, some minor sports become popular when, according to the journalist, in reality, they are not. The initial euphoria and relief of finally having won some medals

was followed by reflection as to the relative value of the sports in which the medals were won.

Indeed, calls for the football season to begin were made in the sports newspapers. Coverage of the Athens Games by *El Mundo Deportivo* was generally restricted to a separate section, allowing football (in particular FC Barcelona-related stories) to dominate the front page and occupy its usual place in the newspaper. This preoccupation with the pre-season build-up to the Spanish football league, including speculation on signings, reports on friendly games, was also reflected in *Marca's* focus on what was happening at Real Madrid. Despite the fact the world's largest sporting event being staged, the Olympic Games took second place behind coverage of the build-up to the Spanish *Primera Liga* season in the widely read sports press.

Spanish press evaluation of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games

As influential opinion formers, the written press played a crucial role in the evaluation of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. This evaluation followed the partisan-universal discourse, focusing on an evaluation of the Spanish Olympic team's performance as a reflection of Spanish sport and the Spanish nation, as well as reflection on the success of the Games in organisational and sporting terms.

La Razón (30/08/04) stated that the medals table acted as a mirror that reflected the relative competitive position of nations. The day after the closing ceremony all of the Spanish newspapers stared into this mirror to see what the Olympic Games revealed about not only the state of Spanish sport, but also the position of Spain in terms of wider international relations.

The headlines expressed satisfaction with the medal count, but not with the way in which they had been won. On the day after the closing ceremony *La Razón* and *El País* undertook literal evaluations in awarding the Spanish performance with a grade, the former stated that “Spain leaves Athens with a good grade” (30/08/04: 1) and the latter saying they were “Notable” (30/08/04: 39) (a grade used in the academic system to indicate a good, but not outstanding performance), while also recognising that Spain had achieved its second biggest medal haul in history after Barcelona’92.

However, *El Mundo Deportivo* highlighted the lack of gold medals in the Spanish performance with the headline ‘Silver harvest’ (30/08/04: 3). Certain journalists were much harder in their criticism of the Olympic team’s performance, concluding that ‘silver medals are losers’ medals’ and that ‘we (Spain) are a loser country that tends to get beaten’ (*Marca* 30/08/04: 36).

Spanish honour was clearly at stake as the nations of the world took stock of their respective performances. The headline ‘Goodbye Athens, hello Beijing’ in *Marca* highlighted a tendency among the other newspapers to put Athens behind them and look to the future. Interviews held with the Secretary of State for Sport and representatives of the Spanish Olympic Committee questioned the Spanish performance and sought answers as to how improvement was to be made for 2008. The reasons given by the Spanish Sports Minister for the relatively disappointing performance involved a combination of bad luck and lack of killer instinct, which agreed with Crolley and Hand’s (2002) explanations of *mala suerte* and *victimismo*.

In certain cases, staring into the mirror of the medals table became an obsessive, narcissus-like activity. *El País*, for example, declared that a ‘collective blunder’ had occurred, concluding that ‘if the only valid barometer is the medals, the failure of the

Spanish team has been absolute' (30/08/04: 47). The newspaper was disappointed that Spain had failed to surpass countries with less economic power and/or lower population levels such as the Ukraine, Hungary, Holland, Cuba and South Korea, and was a long way from its neighbours France (33 medals and Italy (30).

The fact that national newspapers dedicated column space to converting the medals table into a symbolic mirror that is interpreted as reflecting world order demonstrates the continued importance of the Olympic Games as an international event for the media. Journalists attempted to make calculations and develop formulae to explain why certain countries win more medals than others. The results of these calculations were used to make generalisations about the state of international relations, the global economy and were also used as means to interpret history. The fact that some countries can see themselves and others reflected in the sporting performances of the Olympic Games means that the days around the closing ceremony become a key period for the contemplation of national identity. The aforementioned interviews with the Spanish sports politicians highlighted the political importance of sport in the construction of national identity and the development of national pride.

Conclusions

The Spanish press coverage of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games was predominantly partisan and the process of reducing the information and entertainment contents of the Games highlighted the overriding tendency to use a nationalist lens to interpret events. These findings reinforced Crolley and Hand's (2002) research using a wider sample of newspapers in the Olympic context, revealing clear tendencies in the reporting of

Spanish national team performances by the press, which contributed to the construction and reproduction of national identity.

The judgements cast by journalists formed the basis of an oscillating discourse; moving the readers from hyped optimism to sensational pessimism, back to optimism and celebration, before ending on a note of introspection, pessimism and uncertainty regarding the future. This partisan perspective overtook concerns for more universal themes, apart from the doping issue, which eclipsed the historical significance of the Games, Olympism and its values.

Indeed, the reductionist national lens of the press focused more specifically on the success (or lack thereof) in the male team sports. This produced a predominantly masculine interpretation of the Games, largely undertaken by male journalists, as well as a devaluation of what were perceived as secondary sports. The general dissatisfaction with how Spain had won its medals involved a return to *fatalismo* and explanations of defeat in terms of *mala suerte* (bad luck) and *victimismo* (being victimised) by officials or foul play by the opposing team.

This fluctuating reporting by the press is a perhaps the product of the multiple interpretations that exist as to the nature of Spanish national identity, in a state comprised of strong regional, and in some cases national identities. The construction of Spanish national identity and establishment of democracy has occurred in the context of accelerated globalising processes. The reinforcement of 'local' identities in this global context has resulted in the emergence of previously suppressed cultures within the Spanish state and thus the renegotiation of national identities. When these different and sometimes competing identities come together around sporting mega-events as part of the 'media sport complex', there is a lack of consensus, which is compounded by the a

tendency for the Spanish national soccer team and the Olympic team to under perform in the eyes of the media.

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