International Football and International Relations: Football as Foreign Policy Between Italy and England, 1933, 1934, and 1939

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis aims to illuminate the interconnected nature of European politics and football (soccer), especially on the international competitive level, in the governments of Italy and England in the 1930s. As Italy rose to prominence on the political scene of Europe, it became a threat to English dominance of world football. This growing threat to sporting reputation also represented the growing threat of Italian Fascism to British democracy, such that each government developed policies toward international sport aimed to meet wider foreign policy goals. The three international football matches between the two nations in the 1930s illustrate the politicized nature of international sporting competition, revealing the influence of these matches on general Anglo-Italian relations. Through a comparative study of contemporary newspaper reports, this thesis reveals the role that international football competitions between England and Italy in the 1930s played in shaping the wider diplomatic relations between the two nations, as distinct styles and attitudes toward the game mirrored the differing political approaches and ambitions of the states.
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INTRODUCTION

The political climate of interwar Europe fostered unprecedented governmental experiments, in which Fascism and Communism challenged the established understanding democracy was the universal form of governance. The development of these political movements and their implementation in national governments in Central and Eastern Europe triggered the evolution of unprecedented domestic and foreign policies aimed at legitimizing and enhancing the spread of Fascism and Communism. With a strong focus on nationalism, influenced by the proceedings of the Paris Peace Conference, and addressing the demobilization of millions of troops sent to fight throughout Europe between 1914 and 1919, the development of Fascism in Italy sought to unite the nation under a strong centralized government based on efficient organization and a drive to recapture past national glory. At the other end of the political spectrum, interwar Great Britain represented the bastion of traditional liberal democracy, set at odds with the radicalizing tendencies on the European Continent. In this period, in which a new international diplomacy arose, international sport was a unique way for governments to project their interests to all of Europe, and many nations developed intricate policies through which international sporting competition could serve governmental foreign policy aims. The interwar period represents the height of the politicization of sport, and football matches between England and Italy represent the linkage of political prestige to sporting ability, while acting as auxiliary forms of diplomacy. This thesis highlights the politicized nature of international football in the meetings between Italy in the 1930s, as Italian football and politics threatened the traditional British hegemony in those endeavors, through comparative newspaper analysis surrounding the three matches, played in 1933, 1934, and 1939.
Fascist Italy’s decade of success in international football directly challenged England more prominently than other European nations, as the island nation represented the premier sporting power in Europe, as the originator, codifier, and exporter of football, as well as the most prominent representative of democracy. The successes of Italian international football, then, served to threaten British prominence and prestige by approaching international sporting encounters in an extra-sporting, highly political manner. British notions of sport completely separated these leisure activities from the interests of national government. Slow to fully enter the international sporting environment which blossomed in the interwar period, and equally slow to recognize the politicized nature of international football, Britain viewed such encounters through the prism of protectionism and non-interventionism that characterized its wider foreign policy. By illuminating the ways in which these two nations differed in a political approach to football, and the ways in which their policies toward international sport directly reflected wider foreign policy, this thesis relates the importance of any sporting encounter between England and Italy in the 1930s. Only contesting for football prestige three times over the decade, in 1933, 1934, and 1939, the Italian and English national football teams represented the current policies of their respective governments. These three matches highlight the progression and evolution of policies toward sport as an arm of foreign policy, and a close examination of the political context of each match, and the importance each plays in wider Anglo-Italian relations, contributes to a wider understanding of the political climate of the interwar years, as liberal democracy repeatedly attempted to maintain its prominence as its was challenged by Continental developments. Therefore, the matches of 1933, 1934, and 1939 were more than sporting
encounters, as the two national teams represented not only their country but their national forms of government, pitting Fascism against democracy, through highly developed policies aimed at achieving propaganda successes for the respective nations.

Focusing on both Italian and English newspaper reporting on the three football matches of the decade, as well as more traditional political publications regarding Anglo-Italian relations, this study chronicles the development of these international football encounters as part of wider foreign policies of the two nations. Complemented by more recent scholarship, which also catalogs the importance of politicized sport in the 1930s, and standard foreign policy studies of the period, the thesis examines the politicization of sport in a comparative context, as English and Italian policies evolve throughout the decade, and are highly influenced by England-Italy encounters.

The study consistently uses the European, anglicized term “football” or the Italian term “calcio” for the American concept of soccer. The use of these terms relates to the universal language of the sport in Europe during the interwar years, while the distinction between “football” and “calcio” becomes increasingly important as the game develops uniquely in both Italy and England.

The scholarship discussing international sporting activity and its relevance to international political activity and diplomacy mainly consists of collections of essays, each describing an individual sporting incident involving one country in one time period. Few book-length studies devote themselves to an examination of one nation’s sporting development, its political uses, and major encounters in global competition. These collections contain articles focusing on the ways in which governments approach international sport in the twentieth century, ranging from active pursuit of competition to
a reactionary predisposition, and almost all contain a chapter on either Italy or Britain in the 1930s. Discussions of sport in Italy and Britain are almost exclusively in relation to their political systems in the interwar years. The discourse on England and international sport in this period consistently links the actions of sporting associations with the governmental policies of appeasement that characterize British foreign policy throughout the decade. Similarly, scholars writing on international sport in Italy portray the connections between Mussolini’s Fascist government, its worldview and foreign policy, and the expeditions of Italian teams in international competition. Most of these works focus on football, the national sport of both England and Italy in this period, and the sport through which dramatically proliferated in instances of international competition on the European continent. Describing the political and cultural linkages between football and society, these works offer insight into the ability of international competition to foster national sentiment and achieve results of national prestige. While most of this scholarship focuses on individual nations and their international sporting policy, only Peter J Beck consistently delineates the importance of the interaction of the English and Italian national football teams, who played each other only three times in the decade, but over a 7 year span in which the political order of Europe changed substantially. His work, understanding these matches in their extra-sporting significance and their reflection of Anglo-Italian relations, serves as a useful backdrop to this exposition on the politicization of sporting encounters between Italy and England.

To supplement this material, a necessary reading of both Italian and English foreign policy programs throughout the 1930s contributes to a wider view than offered by the specific policies directed toward the three football matches, in 1933, 1934, and 1939.
By locating the matches in the wider context of Anglo-Italian relations, and the general foreign policy aims of each nation, the discussion of these matches should be grounded in an attempt to avoid overemphasis or misreading of the effects on politics and society. General foreign policy texts of this period are plentiful, and merely provide a background the more specific scholarship and primary sources on the football matches. Therefore, the works of Burgwyn, Adams, and Rock illuminate the main trends of Fascist foreign policy and the development and implementation of British appeasement policies.

A larger body of scholarship exists that discusses the effects of Fascism on Italian life and society, and traces the evolution of sport in Italy and its important role in bringing governmental programs to the masses of the nation. Far from inventing international sport or even sport as mass leisure, Italian Fascists were relatively late to understand the role that sport could play in modernizing the nation, improving Italian physical fitness, or in winning prestige for the nascent regime, for both the Italian populace and beyond its borders. Book-length works from Victoria di Grazia, Borden Painter Jr, and Simon Martin trace the development of sport to meet the needs of the Fascist government, its role in transforming the physical nature of the nation’s inhabitants and landscape, and finally the ways in which sport on an international scale propagated the strength of Italy as well as the Fascist form of government. Tracing the development of Fascist sporting policies, the creating of a bureaucratic framework to disseminate those policies throughout the entire nation, and chronicling the successes of the regime, these works reveal the impressive breadth and speed of the Fascist initiatives to mold the Italian nation through sport. These works also reveal the ways in which football rose to its prominent role in Italy, as its attributes were consistent with Fascist ideals, as well as
describing the ways in which it was tied even closer to Italian society through Fascist initiatives to nationalize the game, removing any previous ties to the English originators. Articles from Roberta Vescovi and Martin illustrate more directly the influence of state-sponsored sport of the development of Italian youth, and the importance of international football in the 1930s. Italian languages works such as *Atleti in Camicia Nera* and *Calciatori in Camicia Nera* provide a different framework through which to observe the way through which the Fascist government infiltrated all levels of sport throughout its reign, and the way in which athletes, especially footballers (*calciatori*) were used as an extension of Italian foreign policy.

A final section of scholarship contributes to a close reading of newspaper reports on football, as Crolley and Hand’s book reveals a close linkage between ideas of national identity and sports journalism. Understanding the national tendencies of British sportswriters and their cultural background allows for a more precise reading of match reports and descriptions of football behavior. The understanding of national identity in the context of football is also useful in a study in which sporting success is equated with national prestige and enthusiasm. Bill Murray’s classic history of football also proves valuable in this context, by contributing historical information that covers the introduction of football to Italy, and other valuable information absent from the period studies that focus more intensely on the interwar period.

A synthesis of this previous scholarship and a reading of contemporary Italian and English newspapers chronicling the football encounters of the Italian and English national teams of May 1933, November 1934, and May 1939 provides the basis for this study, revealing the important political connotation of these events. As procedures of
extra-sporting importance, these football matches reveal the highly politicized nature of the interwar period, especially the years preceding the outbreak of hostilities in 1939, as well as illuminate the lengths to which governments were willing to exert influence on the international stage. Finally, these sporting matches, the way in which they are discussed, approached, and contested, clearly reflect on the foreign policies of the respective nations. The role of sport in the national politics of England and Italy can be set along parallel series of evolution, which match the evolution of foreign policy aims and initiatives. In Fascist Italy, the development of sporting policy progressed from an emphasis on physical fitness and eugenics to an understanding of the substantial role of international competition in extending Italian interests, visibility, and governmental prestige. For England, sport had been apolitical, progressing to play a role in modernization, and government officials only began to approach international sport with caution, to ensure the viability of strategic interests, after understanding its important role in the policies of potentially threatening nations. These notions of sport developed at different speeds in different nations throughout Europe, and only became viable for political aims in the years following the First World War.

This thesis synthesizes previous scholarship with a close comparative study of contemporary newspaper reporting in England and Italy to demonstrate the deliberate creation and execution of policies toward England-Italy footballing matters aimed to supplement and foster Anglo-Italian relations. While most previous scholarship focuses closely on connections between international sport and governmental relations of either interwar Italy or England, this study reveals the interaction between these policies, as each England-Italy match distorted the tenor of diplomacy while influencing the
development and evolution of politico-sporting policies. The information gathered from newspaper reporting, coupled with previous scholarship of government policy documents, highlights the undeniable link between international sport and governmental activity in the interwar period, as the governments of Italy and England utilized international competition as events through which wider policy aims could be met in a unique environment which was not explicitly political.

**SPORT IN FASCIST ITALY - CREATING CONSENT AND THE FUTURE SOLDIERS OF THE NEW ITALY**

To understand the role that football, especially on the international stage, came to play in the policy of Fascist Italy, one must first understand the way in which Fascist leadership came to embrace, modify, and implement their policies of sport on Italian society. The importance of sport to Fascist policy can be understood within a larger global trend occurring in 20th century Europe. European nations, such as England and France, realized the utility of sport for national purposes far earlier than Italy, as seen in the English view of sport as important to modernization.¹ The rise of competitive sports in England was closely tied to desire to raise physical fitness, and the public school system functioned as the incubator of this movement, codifying team sports in an attempt to instill values of courage and “manliness.”² The advent of mass consumer culture around the First World War accelerated the growth of sport, especially in forming a mass audience. The rising popularity of sport in this period led to more direct government interaction in sport and its use in developing military strength, and “most spectacularly in

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² ibid, 22.
the dictatorships but by no means limited to then, sport in the interwar years took on a distinctly militaristic flavor.”3 Benito Mussolini’s rise to power, and implementation of a fascist authoritarian state in 1922, created a system of government that advocated the subordination of the masses to a powerful centralized state, and sport would play a major role in achieving the ideological goals of the new Fascist Italy. Along with control of mass media and propaganda, sport proved to be an important and powerful tool for mass consent, while also promoting Fascist ideals, such as subordination of the individual to a collective body, physical strength and vigor, military preparation for an irredentist and imperialist foreign policy, and the recovery of the greatness of the Roman Empire.4 Mass media was particularly useful, with sports papers flourishing as the government wanted to ensure that its athletic success would influence citizens to be prouder of Italy, identify with the nascent regime and become more athletic themselves.5 The media played a large role in the spread of the Dopolavoro (after work) program, as the advertising campaigns helped foster a national audience and national identification.6 Angela Teja has distinguished three phases of sporting policy in Fascist Italy, gradually increasing in emphasis on politicization of sport and use in military preparation. From the start of the regime and through the 1920s, sport is merely part of primary schooling, through physical education programs. In the early to late 1930s, sport becomes a powerful vehicle of political propaganda, with well-trained athletes frequently appearing in international

3 ibid, 25
competitions. By the late 1930s, physical training shifts from sports skills to active military preparation in physical education curriculum. Fascist sports policy throughout the 1920s and 1930s was highly successful in achieving these goals, spending much time, money, and resources on building a national organization of sport, aiming not only for mass control and consent, but for a high level of competitive success. These political aims of sport were in line with a larger European trend to link national prestige with sport, especially on an international stage, where the outcome of a match reflected on more than athletic ability but in fact represented “the quality of a country’s sociopolitical system.”

The development of a large bureaucratic organization for sport both revealed the central government’s willingness to promote a widespread initiative for physical fitness, but also laid the foundation for the great successes of Italian sporting groups in the interwar period. The creation of the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro (OND) in 1925 marks the initial governmental action in the pursuit of a policy of mass leisure, aimed at controlling the after-work (dopolavoro) activities of the mass Italian population, while instilling Fascist ideology and creating new fascist individuals. The pursuit of the “New Man” was a great aim of Mussolini’s Fascist government, and the sporting programs united the daily lives of Italian society and linked the population to larger Fascist policy aims. These sporting programs and the emphasis on youth education served the government’s main goal, the physical preparation of all able Italians to serve in military

8 Victoria De Grazia, The Culture of Consent, 4.
9 Barbara J Keys, Globalizing Sport, 36.
10 Victoria De Grazia, The Culture of Consent, 175.
conquest or any other endeavor to demonstrate the superiority and greatness of the Italian race. Football brought out these values, presenting the ideals of the “New Man” in its emphasis on “youth, love of risk and danger, sacrifice to the nation’s cause, and pride in the nation.” The best characterization of the “New Man” was propagated by the OND itself, in that “the ideal *dopolavorista sportiva* was indeed the disciplined mass man: not overly competitive, yet with a well-developed ‘self-confidence and a sense of “fair-play”’; ‘fit’ and ‘virile,’ with a profound sense of team spirit.” As part of a wider eugenic framework, the Italian system of OND, as well as the *Operazione Nazionale Ballila* (ONB) youth organization, developed the physical fitness and athleticism of the Italian nation at all levels of society. Through distinction of elite, competitive sports (such as football) and the more egalitarian sports (swimming, bocce), the Italian government created opportunities for every Italian citizen to increase and maintain a healthy level of fitness. The elite sports, such as the national football league, *Serie A*, and Olympics were better funded and supervised by the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI), while the “low sports,” such as bocce and gymnastics were supervised under the *Dopolavoro* program (OND). Mirroring ideals of corporativism and national vitality, these organizations foster a spirit of anti-individualism, instilling an ideology that favors submission to a larger body.

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13 ibid, 172.
14 ibid, 7.
Beginning in 1927, the Fascist government created a new organization responsible for the physical education of Italian youth, the *Opera Nazionale Ballila* (ONB).\(^\text{15}\) The ONB divided the youth of Italy into age groups and sexes, and each division with organized along military bases, such as squads, platoons, centuries, and legions.\(^\text{16}\) The militarized nature of this organization reveals governmental understanding that the nation needed a new generation, strengthened physically and ideologically, to “achieve the totalitarian unity and iron will that would enable Mussolini to pass from words to territorial acquisition,” and sport and military training became linked to achieve this goal.\(^\text{17}\) While young men and boys were primed to become the future citizen-soldiers of the great Fascist empire, young women and girls were also motivated to win the “battle for bodies” and fix the demographic problem of declining birth rates.\(^\text{18}\) This campaign for increased birth rates necessitated healthy women, who carried the responsibility of bearing and raising the next generation of Fascist soldiers, and represented an Italian response to the Europe-wide trend toward eugenic policies. The Italian program shows how “the regime in effect appropriated as its own a whole series of popular pastimes, incorporating what had previously been experienced as autonomous expressions of class or community into the social life of the state, associating them with its official activities and infusing them with new competitiveness.”\(^\text{19}\) The Fascists embraced previously popular activities, reshaping them to fit the program of their new centralized, 

\(^{15}\) Vescovi, “Children into Soldiers: Sport and Fascist Italy,” 166.  
\(^{16}\) ibid, 170.  
\(^{19}\) De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent*, 170.
authoritarian state. Using sport to encourage wider physical fitness, later evolving into preliminary military training, helped endear the Italian nation to Fascist leadership, as it ardently strove for “instilling blind obedience towards the state in the Italian people.”

This early stage of Balilla activity was aimed at fostering a militaristic spirit in the Italian nation through physical education of youth. By the 1930s, however, the mission of ONB shifted to use sport to “produce champions, super-heroes who could be shown off in public, and be used as propaganda abroad as symbols of a strong nation in good health and worthy of respect.” The Fascist government had created a system in which any Italian citizen would be in contact with an organization devoted to instilling values of fitness and virility throughout his entire life, whether the Balilla organizations of youth or the after work athletic participation of the Dopolavoro program. Far from mere leisure activity, “sport became a form political education for the masses for pedagogic, hygienic, military and chauvinistic reasons; but above all, in order to ensure the perpetuation of Fascism itself.”

Mussolini’s wide ambition to physically reshape the population could only be achieved through an equally ambitious program of infrastructure development. Mussolini was preaching to the masses of Italy to exercise, participate in sporting activities, and create a new stronger Italian race, and the Fascist government had to provide the facilities and programs that would allow the population to achieve these goals. This program was listed in its entirety in the Carta di Viareggio of 1926, which served to outline the

21 ibid., 176.
22 Vescovi, “Children into Soldiers,” 182.
fascistization of all Italian sport. Under the banner “Ogni commune deve avere il proprio campo sportivo,” stating that every community should have its own sporting facility, organizations such as the Dopolavoro, Balilla, and CONI (Italian Olympic Committee) engaged in a massive building program, focusing both on areas for mass leisure sports, such as gymnasium and swimming pools, as well as the largest stadia-building initiative in Italian history. These programs lent a sort of egalitarian aspect to the sporting and leisure policy dictated from the centralized Fascist government, as even the provincial cities and towns benefitted from national programs, a novel experience for a recently unified country with a history of regional tension. The real success of Mussolini’s building plan, though, was the large-scale stadia building. The exemplary project was the Foro Mussolini, “a fascist showpiece that linked fascism’s cult of the body and physical strength with the traditions of imperial Rome,” “provided for the physical and spiritual education of the new generations of Italians,” and “gave the Opera Nazionale Balilla a magnificent sports city to train and showcase youth.” Part modernization, part remembrance of the Roman Empire, the new stadia not only provided adequate facilities for the athletes but a forum for mass spectators, another byproduct of football culture appropriated by the Fascist government. The union of thousands of fans, meeting together in support of their team represented “an ideal, choral collectivity coming together in a single, viscerally felt, faith and cause, much like Fascism itself,” and exemplified Fascist ideals of success through solidarity, prestige, and excellence, creating

24 ibid, 80.
national sentiment at a level above individual identification.\textsuperscript{26} The enthusiasm of football
supporters would play an even more significant role in international football matches,
pitting nations against each other in a struggle for not only sporting, but also cultural and
national prestige.\textsuperscript{27} The substantial nature of the Fascist sporting infrastructure-building
campaign resulted in the awarding of the second World Cup tournament in 1934, in
which most matches would be played in the newly-built or newly-renovated stadia
promoting the new Fascist values and ties to the glory of ancient Rome.\textsuperscript{28} Many of the
stadia built by Mussolini in the incredibly short time period preceding the 1934 World
Cup still form the base of modern Italian football infrastructure.

The separation of sports between competitive endeavors and leisure activity can
explain the widespread success and popularity of Fascist sporting policy. The mass sports
of the \textit{Dopolavoro} were developed to foster both healthy individuals and well as a
communal spirit throughout the nation, by creating sporting organizations that united
like-minded individuals and provided a framework through which Italians could increase
their health and vitality. These programs also allowed a Fascist presence in most
communities throughout the country, providing direct access to the population and
allowing maintenance of the standards aimed at creating a healthy, virile nation. The
great example of this virility was Mussolini himself, portrayed often in the press as an
avid sportsman, whose actions represented the strength of the entire Italian nation.
Mussolini’s personal athleticism presented the ability of sport “to bring Italians together,

\textsuperscript{26} Gordon and London, “Italy 1934: Football and Fascism,” 45.
\textsuperscript{27} Keys, \textit{Globalizing Sport}, 36.
\textsuperscript{28} Gordon and London, “Italy 1934: Football and Fascism,” 44.
modernize the nation, and improve the physical side of Italy in a Darwinist sense.”

Il Duce embodied the Fascist program to such heights that, “with his mystification of the state and the glory of the Roman past he fitted well into the international sports movement that shared much of the same ideas.” While these policies extended sporting opportunities to all levels of the Italian population, elite competitive sports served a more political role for Mussolini. Sports like cycling and football produced highly trained athletes intended to compete for the glory and national prestige of Fascist Italy. As examples of the highest level of physical fitness, these athletes were the pinnacles of Fascist sports policy, becoming heroes of sorts, occupying a special place in the collective memory of the nation. They represented the possibilities of a new rejuvenated Italy on the path to regaining its place of significance on the European and world stage, reminiscent of Ancient Rome. Football was to become the sport which best epitomized the ideal Fascist notions of sport, as it valued strength and physical ability, while more importantly stressing identification with the larger team organization, devaluing the importance of the individual. Also, the idea of a national team devised of players spanning Italy matched the Fascist desire to reach out to all parts of the country, yet maintain and promote a centralized governmental structure. Compared to other popular elite sports, such as cycling and auto racing, football was the obvious choice to represent Fascism, not only in the ease with which it could be easily molded to match Fascist ideals, but also for its widespread popularity, which predated the March on Rome.

29 Kruger, “Strength through Joy,” 76.
30 ibid, 80.
31 De Grazia, The Culture of Consent, 171.
33 De Grazia, The Culture of Consent, 151.
Mussolini’s government did not develop the popularity and propagation of sport in Italy, but did fascistize it quickly after 1922 through the *Carta di Viareggio* (1927), realizing the significant role it could play in their overall plans for Italy. Once the Fascists understood the mass appeal of football, they worked to manipulate it to their aims, valuing the way in which it could inspire people to reconstruct the forms of the national body.34 Football’s history in Italy reaches back to the late nineteenth century, first developed by expatriate British men in the northwestern triangle comprised of Milano, Torino, and Genoa. The development of football in Italy mimicked that of many other continental European nations, in that it was brought by Britons and quickly became popular in bourgeois, Anglophile communities, placing it at odds with the working-class traditions of the game in Britain itself. The sport grew in popularity and spread farther south, quickly becoming the national obsession. As football became more popular in Italy, the truly dominant national sport around the time of Mussolini’s rise to power, the Fascist government initiated a campaign to make the sport part of and idealized, nationalist, Fascist community.35 In its original state as a direct British import, football could never be accepted as part of Fascist Italy, so the language of the game underwent a slow but drastic change in the first decades of the twentieth century. In fact, this move to nationalized football had preceded Mussolini’s reign, with the first major initiative the renaming of the Italian footballing authority in 1909, from the Anglicized Italian Football Federation (FIF) to Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio (FIGC).36

34 Martin, “Football and Fascism,” 81.
35 ibid, 80.
Lanfranchi, this action serves as a “symbolic purging” of the British roots of Italian football.\(^{37}\) The term “football” itself was also a major target, and unlike the rest of continental Europe, Italy strayed from a mere transliteration of the word in favor of an italicized term, reviving the term “\textit{calcio}.” Parting with the term “football” represents a true effort to nationalize the British game, distinguishing \textit{calcio} as and Italian game, not merely a copy of the game that originated in England. The use of the term “\textit{calcio}” is also important. From the term “to kick,” \textit{calcio} had a long history in Italy, hearkening back to Florentine games played centuries earlier. The Fascist government, therefore, created a distinctly Italian sport, which would develop its own characteristic style and tied this sport to the prestige of old Italy, far before the modern British game was codified.\(^{38}\) These steps mark the origins of the close tie between Italian football and Fascism, and represent a recurring theme of Mussolini’s government, appropriating previously existing, popular facets of Italian society to and aligning them with Fascist ideals. In regards to football, a sport which Mussolini did not personally appreciate, the Fascist government was successful in attempts to adapt the national passion of Italy to its own policies and goals in government. Lanfranchi and Wagg credit these Italian endeavors, both the Fascist actions and those predating 1922, as so successful that by the 1930s football Italy was regarded as the antithesis of the sport in Britain, both in Italy and throughout the Continent.\(^{39}\) Another major step in the nationalization of the sport involved renaming those teams with English history and names. Many of the most successful and popular teams were rebranded, as Genoa 93 became Genova 93, AC Milan became Milano, and.

\(^{37}\) ibid, 126.
\(^{38}\) Giuseppe di Candido, \textit{Calciatori in Camicia Nera: Lo sport piu amato dagli italiani durante il ventennio fascista} (Roma: Edizioni Associate, 2006), 50.
\(^{39}\) Lanfranchi, “Cathedrals in Concrete,” 127.
Internazionale Milan became Ambrosiano, with all names reflecting the grounding of the teams in their local Italian communities.40 The combined efforts of Italicizing football in Italy, the massive campaign to modernize sporting infrastructure, and the development of national sporting organizations such as the OND and CONI laid the framework for the meteoric rise in Italian football prowess and allowed the Fascist government to harness this prestige for political means. Thus through Fascist initiatives, “football was the game being played in the streets of the cities, the dusty tracks in the countryside, and watched in the growing stadiums around the country: organized into the dopolavoro movement it was one of the positive features of Fascism.”41

Italian football rose from European obscurity in the late nineteenth century to become one of the most successful national teams of the early twentieth century, and this progression was both linked to Fascist sporting policy and served the aims of the Fascist government. The success of Italian football in the 1930s made it a viable tool for diplomatic and domestic propaganda, as victories on the pitch were equated with “Fascism’s successful regeneration of the national body.”42 From the inception of the first national professional competitive league in 1929, Italian club teams grew in popularity and ability throughout Italy, presenting a view of football at its highest level to the spectators throughout the nation. Matching Mussolini’s desires to be an influential presence on the European stage, Italian club teams began competing in European club tournaments, and quickly rose to prominence. The team from Bologna was the most

successful Italian club team in international competitions in the 1930s, winning the
Mitriopa Cup (Central European Championship) in 1933 and 1934, and defeating an
English club to win the Paris Exhibition Tournament in 1937.\(^43\) These international
matches were approached as more than mere sport, often directly used by Mussolini as an
extension of politics.\(^44\) When Bologna FC won the Paris Exhibition Tournament against
the English team Chelsea, fascist leaders and press praised the victory and claimed it for
the entire Italian nation, as “whenever any Italian citizen has to fight, whether in the heart
of the motherland or beyond its borders, he can always bring the Italian flag to
triumph.”\(^45\) This particular victory held significance for Mussolini, as he took pride in
embarrassing Leon Blum’s Popular Front Government, cancelling a friendly match in
1937 and withdrawing the Italian contingent from the Tour du France.\(^46\) By using sport to
discredit Blum’s leftist government, Mussolini equates sport and its successes with the
virility of the Fascist form of government. After the Abyssinian invasion and war with
Ethiopia in 1935, matches and competitions were carefully selected, and Italian athletes
did not appear in sporting competitions of nations who had placed sanctions on Italy.\(^47\)
These examples reveal only a few instances of Mussolini’s willingness to use
international sport as a sort of diplomacy, especially against perceived enemies. The
1930s also proved to be the period of great achievement for the Italian national team,
rising from anonymity to become the only true contenders to English claims of
footballing superiority. By winning two successive World Cup championships, in 1934

\(^{45}\) ibid, 98.
\(^{47}\) Angela Teja, “Italian sport and international relations under fascism,” 162.
and 1938, as well as the gold medal at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the Italians announced their arrival as the dominant footballing nation on the European continent. The successes of Italian teams abroad reinforced Mussolini’s declarations to restore the Italian nation to its period of greatness, even when military exploits ended in embarrassment and disappointment.\textsuperscript{48} The Italian teams supplanted the military as the most successful organization of Italian citizens in conflicts on foreign soil, and the correlation between international sport and military conquest was more than implied, as Italian athletes were valorized as heroic soldiers of Italy.\textsuperscript{49} Therefore, international football served Mussolini’s government in providing a means of intimidation and display of power on foreign soil, while also rallying the nation at home around the power and prestige of the Italian nation under Fascism.

**OPPOSING VIEWS OF SPORT: ITALY AND ENGLAND IN THE 1930S**

As Italy’s footballing and political prominence grew throughout Mussolini’s regime, achieving a decade of Continental superiority, it set itself on course for a major confrontation with Britain, the dominant footballing and political power of interwar Europe. In contrast to Italy, English government did not regard sport, especially football, as a political manner. Britain’s ambivalence to the political nature of sport is characteristic of those nations which were late to enter the fray of international sporting competition, as the British “steadfastly adhered to the view that sport was a private, nonpolitical matter.”\textsuperscript{50} For the British, “sport was Victorian; it reflected the wider liberal

\textsuperscript{48} Martin, “Football and Fascism,” 82.
\textsuperscript{49} Kruger, “Strength Through Joy,” 78.
\textsuperscript{50} Barbara J Keys, *Globalizing Sport*, 37.
belief in minimal state intervention and small government.”\(^{51}\) Always regarded as the “masters” of the game, England remained aloof from the initial development of international football, separated in “splendid isolation” from the activity of the Continent. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the English Football Association (FA) seems conflicted in its pursuit of international football:

“Historically, the FA, often accepting a kind of missionary role, proved by far the most outgoing British association in terms of its willingness to face foreign opposition, but even its approach proved essentially reactive, that is, either accepting, deferring or rejecting foreign invitations, rather than proactive in the sense of taking the initiative in such matters.”\(^{52}\)

British football associations viewed foreign matches as serving numerous motives, such as to “promote the spread of the national game, consolidate its status as the world game in the face of the challenge from other sports, establish the quality of British football,” and other self-serving methods of cultural imperialism, but never contemplated its uses in regard to national prestige or political importance.\(^{53}\)

The new international order following World War I caused the British to rethink their position on the politicization of sport, especially football, in response to changing continental views on international sport. Throughout the 1920s, the British recognized the political significance of football and other sports in its major political threats: Germany, the USSR, and Italy. The increased politicization of sport in these states, along with the


\(^{53}\) ibid, 106.
increase in quality and prominence of continental football, “forced officials to acknowledge the broader policy implications of international football, including its propaganda potential.”\textsuperscript{54} These sentiments again only engender reactionary policies and a limited understanding of the possibility of international football as a means of projecting a favorable national image. The eventual evolution of British policy came in response to a realization of the use of sport in the European dictatorships, where it was “designed to establish simultaneously the dynamic impact of their respective dictatorships and the alleged decadence of Britain and other liberal democracies.”\textsuperscript{55} Throughout the 1920s the British government failed to fully realize this politico-sporting connection, so that the linkage of political propaganda or prestige with sport was approached in a derogatory manner, associated with continental authoritarianism, not western liberal democracy. A good example of British policy regarding the important political nature of football is a memorandum from the Foreign Office to the FA, a “written warning about the ‘first class’ quality of Italian football, the need for the FA to take any forthcoming England-Italy fixture seriously, and the prudence of the dispatch of the full international side in preference to an amateur eleven.”\textsuperscript{56} This correspondence, tame in comparison to the ambitious plans of Mussolini, caused a mild outrage when leaked to the press for the implication of a politicization of sport. The events of the 1930s, especially the threat of German and Italian advances against British strategic targets, forced the British to rethink the importance of international sport and its political usage. In response to the fascist manipulation of sport seen in Italy and Germany, British policymakers found it

\textsuperscript{54} ibid, 122.  
\textsuperscript{55} ibid, 279.  
\textsuperscript{56} ibid, 123.
impossible to distinguish sport from state. Because “matches involving British teams were interpreted elsewhere as politically significant regardless of the position taken by the British government,” the English FA and Foreign Office began to take more cautious steps in approving international matches, selecting teams, and ensuring respectable outcomes.57

This change in policy directly countered traditional roles of sport in Britain, and their late introduction onto the international sporting scene can be seen as a reflection of the desire to maintain those traditional viewpoints. Yet, by the later years of the 1930s, spurned on by diplomatic representatives abroad, British governments reluctantly accepted that football on a European scene was too important to be left to autonomous sporting bodies, such as the FA.58 It was far too risky for the British government to stand aside and approach any match as apolitical when the opposing nation would be utilizing any and all possible resources to ensure a win that would serve as a testament to national political strength. Yet, British use of sport never rose to the same level of continental nations, much less the nationalistic policies of Mussolini’s Italy. Sport, in its limited political sense, served to “promote British interests more actively by using a hitherto untapped cultural resource: the unique position and prestige of Britain in the world as the founders of modern sport,” a sentiment that directly related to England’s role as developer and exporter of football.59 A comparison of the British policy evolution on international football reveals a sharp contrast to that of the contemporary period of Fascist Italy. As Angela Teja has shown, the decades-long program to utilize sport for

58 ibid, 279.
political aims began early in Mussolini’s regime through physical education programs in school, and then quickly progressed to field highly trained elite athletes who would compete for national prestige in international sporting competitions.\textsuperscript{60} Britain’s policies were merely reactionary in nature over the same time period, a result of the belated understanding of the political value that international sport commanded in the Fascist states on the continent. These programs originated as measures of damage control, ensuring that Britain escaped embarrassment or unknowingly strengthened foreign national sentiment.\textsuperscript{61} Sporting policy never played a widespread or important role in British domestic life as in the Italian case, and only in the late 1930s did the Foreign Office and Football Association begin to work together to use international football matches as a sort of overseas diplomacy initiative.

The use of international football as a diplomatic tool becomes important when placed in the wider context of Anglo-Italian relations in the interwar period, especially in the 1930s. As Mussolini attempted to extend his influence over Europe, his foreign policy aimed at a recreation of a kind of Italian Empire, mostly through dominance of the Mediterranean. This policy directly affected British strategic interests in the same region. These threats to strategic areas in the Mediterranean, combined with British desires to maintain friendly relations with Italy to offset the threat of Nazi Germany, resulted in a complex and dynamic relationship between the two nations during the 1930s. The increasing prestige of Italian football also played a role in complicating the foreign policy overtures of the two nations, with their opposing view of the role of sport for political purposes. Mussolini’s use of international football competitions can be seen to mimic his

\textsuperscript{60} Teja, “Italian sport and international relations under fascism,” 162.
\textsuperscript{61} Beck, \textit{Scoring For Britain}, 123.
expansive and imperialist foreign policy, seeking success abroad to glorify Italian Fascism as well as inculcate a spirit of nationalism and national pride on a domestic level. England, on the other hand, was wary of international competition, approaching every match with caution in order to protect its footballing and political reputation. This protectionist view of international competition correlates with wider foreign policy of the period, in a calm and rational approach to foreign adversaries in an attempt to prevent any rash action that may negatively impact British prestige or honor. The difference can be summed up in the way football players were viewed in their overseas endeavors. In Fascist Italy, the *azzurri* were regarded as soldiers, fighting for Italian prestige on foreign soil, while British athletes were viewed as ambassadors, who could still claim victory in their accomplishments, but only in a diplomatic sense, as in preventing any larger conflict and helping to establish and maintain friendly affairs.

As the Italian national team vigorously sought international prestige by entering and winning multiple tournaments, including three world championships, in the 1930s, they came to threaten Britain’s unchallenged football superiority. Not entering the major European and worldwide international competitions on the continent (1934 and 1938 World Cup Tournaments), the English Football Association demonstrated an isolationist and non-interventionist mentality similar to the plan instituted by British policymakers, which distinguished the British Isles from the European Continent. By the early 1930s it was obvious that these two premier footballing nations must meet to determine superiority or at least establish a friendly rapport through the national game of both

64 Beck, *Scoring For Britain*, 254.
nation-states. The three non-competitive matches contested between England and Italy in 1933, 1934, and 1939 constitute a meeting of the two premier European sporting nations, and each meeting reveals the current diplomatic, international tensions and wider foreign policy strategies of the two states. The changing state of Anglo-Italian relations over the decade, influenced by military, political, and diplomatic developments, are revealed in the three matches played over the decade. A close reading of the media of both nations, in the buildup to the match, reports of the games themselves, and the response to the results reveals the close ties between these international sporting events and high diplomacy between England and Italy. These mere football matches become spectacles, platforms on which to measure the validity of two increasingly differing nations, pitting fascism against democracy, expansionism against protectionism, and revealing the widening gap between England and the European Continent.

**THE FIRST MEETING OF THE MASTERS – MAY 13 1933, ROME**

The match that took place on May 13 1933 in Rome marked the beginning of the relationship between Italian and English football associations, and the published press reports reveal the difference with which the two nations approached international sporting competitions. The most obvious difference can be noted in the amount of newspaper space devoted to sport, and particularly the number of articles written on the match itself. Major English daily newspapers only began to include serious journalistic pieces on sport in the early years of the twentieth century, as it “became the norm rather than an oddity in the sports pages of the ‘quality’ press,” if only in brief articles reporting
the factual information. Even by 1933, articles on sport made up a minor portion of daily newspapers, with far more space dedicated to domestic and foreign political news. By contrast, in the same period, Italian daily newspapers routinely devote an entire page to sporting news and developments, in papers which consist of far fewer pages than their English counterparts. The proportion of daily news devoted to sport, then, was much higher in Italy, and when suitable, dealt extensively with the endeavors of the national football team in international competition. The newspaper coverage in April and May 1933 reveal the drastic difference in sporting publication, as the number of stories on the England-Italy match on May 13 number around twenty in the combined publications of Corriere Della Sera and L’Ambrosiano, while The London Times, Manchester Guardian, and The Observer contain less than ten articles describing the match on May 13. The English newspapers devote much more effort to political developments on the Continent, especially those of Hitler’s Germany, a trend evident throughout the decade. Articles on Italian policies, both domestic and foreign, outnumber those on the match between the two nations. A Times article from May 1 outlines Italy’s policies and viewpoints on Europe, revealing the approach of the English press. The article, entitled “Italy in Europe,” attempts to trace Italy’s historical foreign policy aims, distinguishing periods focused on the Mediterranean and those focused on Continental Europe. Comparing Crispi’s attraction to the Mediterranean and Mussolini’s fascination with the Continent, this journalist determines that these policy aims arise from the distinct desires of northern and southern Italians. This article reveals an attempt to understand Italy and its political

66 “Italy in Europe: From Crispi to Mussolini,” The Times of London, May 1, 1933, 15-16.
framework, even hinting at a kind of Italian encirclement, as “no other nation in Europe is confronted with an alliance between two unfriendly neighbours on her Western and Eastern frontiers” without some sort of treaty offering protection.67 The article views Mussolini’s attempts to institute peace on the Continent, such as the Little Entente and the proposed Four Power Pact, as a good example for the rest of Europe in the attempt to avoid a European war. By suggesting that the passage of the Four Power Pact would make Italy secure and be a step toward European peace, this article not only reveals a sort of appeasing policy toward Italy but also reveals the priorities of the English daily press, far from interested in international sport.

The commentary on Italian Fascism does not end with this lone article, though, as from May 4 to May 17, correspondences to the editor reveal mixed feelings toward Fascist Italy, as diplomats returning from Italy marvel at the successes of Mussolini’s regime. The first correspondence from two members of the House of Commons, returning from the International Parliamentary Commercial Conference in Rome, reveals an amazing transformation of all of Italian society, credited to the Fascists’ modernizing efforts, “an amazing example of the genius of constructive statesmanship.”68 This first article incites a two-week long debate between Englishmen who have travelled to Italy, who discuss the Fascist state in opposing notions of modernization, physical improvement in population, and the successful role of Italian propaganda in shaping these views. The debate on the validity of the Fascist state and the advances in Italian society reveals an English interest in the government of Italy and a divided opinion on how to perceive Fascism on the European continent. Hannon and Dawson, who first commented

67 ibid.
68 Italy Under Fascism Ten Years of Progress,” The Times of London, May 4, 1933, 8.
on the success of Italian Fascism, do not think the form of government is necessarily useful in all contexts, but believe that the success of Italy warrants a closer study of fascism by England’s politicians.\textsuperscript{69} In response, Wickham Steed denounces this view of Italy, instead revealing an indebted nation with extraordinary spending on military and police services and discredits Fascism as a theocracy in which the State replaces God.\textsuperscript{70} He systematically discredits Hannon and Dawson’s reading of the “genius of constructive statesmanship” and points to the English Fascists under Oswald Mosley, their threats to overthrow democracy, as a detriment to all of English society.\textsuperscript{71} These debates reveal an uncertainty towards Italy, a result of a sort of isolationism completely opposite to Mussolini’s gregarious foreign policy, and help explain the often-strained nature of Anglo-Italian affairs throughout the 1930s. Much less space is devoted to international sport in these same issues of \textit{The Times} and the \textit{Manchester Guardian}, revealing the caution which characterizes British approaches to international sport. This caution toward sport aligns with Peter Beck’s timeline for the evolution of British view on sport, as the main concern of British policymakers in the early 1930s was whether to intervene in international football or not, as they had recently come to understand its political weight for its possible adversaries. He deduces that for policymakers, “any England-Italy footballing encounter possessed a political edge, which was sharpened by the game’s status as the national sport in both countries, their high footballing reputation, and the fact that contemporaries viewed, and were encouraged to view, their fixtures as tests of

\textsuperscript{69} ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} “Italy Under Fascism The State and the Individual,” \textit{The Times of London}, May, 6 1933, 6.
\textsuperscript{71} ibid.
primacy in the world of football.”72 Beck’s view is not evident in the newspapers of the period, whose coverage of the preparations for the match consists of only basic information, such as location, time, and team selection.

The limited press coverage of the meeting between the two teams in Rome begins with an article on May 2 describing the history of football in Italy, rising from humble roots in three northern cities, its rise in popularity throughout the nation, and the success of the Italian team in recent years.73 The upcoming match is seen as increasingly important for both countries, with Italy taking the match very seriously as the first meeting with the dominant force in world football, and the English needing a good showing to reinforce their reputation abroad. After some continental matches that may have tampered English prestige, this game necessitates a strong English team to avoid an embarrassing result. The journalist, a correspondent from Rome, reveals the Fascist intervention in football in Italy, and hails the use of the sport to inculcate “their characteristic sense of discipline and ordered enthusiasm” as highly successful.74 The major trend of the English journalism in the prelude to the match is an arrogance and extreme self-confidence in the ability of the English team, and a dismissal of the potential of the Italian team.75 The reports of the match itself, though, reveal a sentiment that the Italians played well, and that the 1-1 draw was a just result.76 The complex reporting of English footballing superiority, with a nod to the positive aspects of the Italian players, 

72 Beck, Scoring for Britain, 148.
74 ibid.
75 “Association Football: English Team Leaves for Italy,” The Times of London, May, 10 1933, 5; Football in the Eternal City,” The Observer, May 14, 1933, 2.
reveals a value of sportsmanship in English journalism. The match reports also describe the great enthusiasm of the Italian fans, who filled the stadium well before the match began, and gave Mussolini a salute “more enthusiastic than any he had received for many years.” Also reflecting the importance of sportsmanship, the match review of *The Times* credited the Italians for superior play in the early parts of the match, as well as lauding the exciting, sporting nature of the match. This particular article also revealed the impression the Italian players made on their English counterparts, who knew little about Italian football. These comments reveal differences between English and Italian sports journalism, with the English reporting far more objective, void of references to prestige, while also revealing a somewhat patriarchal tone.

In the press surrounding the England-Italy match of May 1933, English newspapers reveal the complex standing of international football at the time, as policymakers, especially at the Foreign Office were just beginning to understand the politicized nature of any Italy-England match. Beck’s reading of Foreign Office correspondence suggests that English players are expected to act as diplomats or ambassadors, as “political reasons led the Foreign Office to hope that not only would England win but also players would ‘comport themselves properly off the football field as well as on,’ given probable impacts upon Britain’s image in general.” The diplomatic nature of the athletes is evident in Italian newspaper reports of the day-to-day activities of

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77 Crolley and Hand, *Football and European Identity*, 18.
80 ibid.
81 Beck, *Scoring for Britain*, 149
82 ibid, 150. (Emphasis original)
both teams, representing the incredibly detailed nature of Italian football journalism. An article appearing in *Corriere Della Sera* on May 11 reveals the extra-sporting nature of their visit, including sightseeing tours, banquets, and meetings with Italian governmental officials, resembling the diplomatic visit of ambassadors.\(^8^3\) Contrasted to the expansive coverage of minor football news, the limited publication of sport-specific press in the weeks preceding the match of May 13 reveals the downplayed emphasis on football in the major English daily newspapers, which prefer to report on instances of high diplomacy, and do not seem willing to politicize international sport.

The Italian press, however, quickly deciphers the extra-sporting nature of the match against England, as the articles written in the weeks before the match reinforce the importance of the match, the first pitting Italy against the developers of modern football. The match against England, the first against the “masters” of the game, holds a special place in Italian sporting history, and is seen as an opportunity to establish footballing power on a wider European scale. In the weeks preceding the match to be played in Rome, a nearly daily onslaught of publication informs the Italian nation on all possible minutiae related to the match. Articles in late April, nearly three weeks before the match, reveal that the British team is the strongest ever assembled, as they need a win on the

\(^{8^3}\) “Un confronto che appassionata tutto il calcio europeo,” *Corriere Della Sera*, May, 11 1933, 4. “programma della giornate romane degli ospiti: giovedì, ore 10, allenamento allo Stadio; pomeriggio gita a Castel Gandolfo; venerdì, ora 10, allenamento sul campo della Roma a Testaccio; pomeriggio, ricevimento all’Ambasciata inglese; sera, banchetto offerto dalla Federazione ai dirigenti; sabato mattina visita dei giocatori Italiani e Inglesi al Segretario del Partito e presidente del C.O.N.I. on. Starace; domenica gita a Napoli”
continent to maintain their reputation as unbeatable. This passage sets the tone of the publications of the next three weeks, billing the match as one for European football superiority, claiming that English hegemony has ended, and that Italy will be the first real test of English ability. The match is touted as a de facto European championship, important to the whole Continent, and an historic moment in sport. The Italian press forwards views of Italy from English papers, as Corriere Della Sera reprints part of an article of The Times which discusses the “marvelous” progress of fascistized football and reveals the extent to which a poor showing from England would “fatally compromise” British prestige. The same correspondence from The Times remarks on the Italians’ knowledge of nearly all style of football, resulting from their vast experience in playing many international matches, a result of an aggressive and expansive campaign to increase visibility and success abroad. This extensive history of international matches reveals a sharp contrast to the insular nature of British politics towards international sport.

Another major theme evident in the press focuses on the distinction between England and

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84 “Gli Inglesi a l’incontro di Roma,” Corriere Della Sera, April 27, 1933, 4. “Vincere bisogna, soprattutto nel continente dove il calcio britannico deve mantere una reputazione di imbattibilita’autodecretata dagli Inglesi stessi”
85 “Per il primato calcistico d’Europa,” Corriere Della Sera, May 12, 1933, 3. “Il decisivo confronto italo-inglese a Roma: per il primato calcistico d’Europa”
87 “Viva animazione, attesa, allenamenti per gli imminente confronte che Ceccoslovacchia e Inghilterra,” Corriere Della Sera, May 2, 1933, 4. “Se l’unidici che verra’ a Roma il 13 maggio e che e’ stato dichiarato il migliore della Gran Bretagna dovesse deludere, la nostra reputazione sarebbe fatalmente compromessa”
88 ibid.
Continental Europe, with Italy as the prime expedient of Continental football, while stressing the importance of the confrontation between England and Italy throughout Europe. England’s status as undisputed masters of world football, referred to as their “splendid isolation,” comes under threat in the wake of a close match against Austria, and Italy is portrayed as the main threat to that dominance. The English response to this threat to their dominance, as relayed by the Italian press, can serve as a metaphor for the wider political climate of the same period, as the match is described as the first meeting between the representatives of the new school of the continent and the British masters that maintain primacy. The article is of course referring to the stylistic differences of play as well as the increasing international stage of sport, but the representation is equally merited when regarded to the ideological struggle between Fascism and liberal democracy, pitting the new political experiment of the Continent against to the entrenched traditions of liberal Western Europe. Football journalism exemplifies the way in which international sport in the 1930s was a reflection and extension of a system of government and its basic foreign policy. The Italian press, under Fascist direction, is eager to correlate football success over the British to a victory for Fascism, while the British players act as ambassadors in a sort of higher diplomacy, realizing that more was at stake than a mere football match, but acting only to maintain their previous stature.

90 “Il decisivo confronto italo-inglese a Roma,” Corriere Della Sera, May 12, 1933, 3.
91 “Un confronto che appassionata tutto il calcio europeo,” Corriere Della Sera, May 11, 1933, 4. “Un confronto che appassionata tutto il calcio europeo”
92 “Il decisivo confronto italo-inglese a Roma,” Corriere Della Sera, May 12, 1933, 3. “nel cosiddetto ‘splendido isolamento’”
93 ibid.: “E così vedremo finalmente domani a Roma il primo confronto fra i più’ freschi rappresentanti della nuova scuola calcistica e’ i maestri britannici che ancora oggi mantengono un primato”
94 Beck, Scoring for Britain, 149.
The developing policy of British appeasement is also evident in this match in May 1933, as the English and Italian captains joined in a Fascist salute to the present Mussolini, to the overtures of the Italian crowd. The proposed Italian success would also further Italian support in key central European states, so that football helps achieve foreign policy goals, especially gaining favor with Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. This expansive foreign policy troubled already overworked policymakers throughout the decade, as “Italian ambitions exacerbated the fundamental problem confronting British policymakers in the 1930s, that is over-stretch resulting from the simultaneous threat posed to national interests by three potential aggressors.” Thus, international football encounters between England and Italy can be seen as representative of the respective worldviews of the two nations. Italy’s recent prominence in European sport posed a unique challenge to English prestige, just as Mussolini’s revisionismo foreign policy (“aggressive, saturated with grievance, and hungry for conflict”) represented a unique approach to international politics in the interwar period.

In reporting the first match between Italy and England in 1933, the Italian press constantly links the Italian team with the Fascist government or describes them in their appropriation of Fascist ideals. One of the most striking trends that appears in the Italian press is the militaristic language used to describe football matches, both in previewing the match’s importance as well as to characterize the athletes and their style of play. In the

95 “Il Duce assistee il primo confronto di calcio Italia-Inghilterra nello Stadio del Partito,” Corriere Della Sera, May 14, 1933, 5. “Quindi il capitano inglese Goodall e il capitano italiano Caligaris solgono dal Capo del Governo che stringe loro la mano, mentre il pubblico ancora una volta rinnova la manifestazione di entusiasmo e di simpatia”
97 Beck, Scoring For Britain, 147.
98 Burgwyn, Italian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period, 21.
weeks before May 13, the articles of both Corriere Della Sera and L’Ambrosiano consistently refer to the match as a battle, revealing another extra-sporting characterization for international football encounters. There are numerous uses of terms such as “battaglia,” “combattare,” and “battere” in place of less hostile terms, and the usage increases as the date of the match nears. At its most intense, the phrasing used to describe a football match could be mistaken for a military briefing, predicting an ardent, passionate battle that will test forces to their extreme. This militaristic language reveals the way in which international sport was conceived by the Fascist government and the means by which the press would disseminate that conception to the Italian public. This militaristic description of the Italian team reflects the important role sport played in military preparation as well, and as the decade progressed and military endeavors were undertaken, the warlike description of the national football team increased. Even the British press response to the match was used in Italy to link the athletes to Fascist ideals. A correspondence from London reveals the English response to the match, which ended in a draw with both teams scoring once, and the English critics believe their players were better individually, while the Italians functioned better as a team unit, linking their excellence to an idealized view of collectivity that made football a model for Fascism.

The Italian press also reports the links between Mussolini himself and the spectacle of the

100 “Il decisivo confronto italo-inglese a Roma,” Corriere Della Sera, May 12, 1933, 4.
103 “Bilancio di fine stagione dei calciatori azzurri,” Corriere Della Sera, May 15, 1933, 3. “gli Italiani sono apparsi indubbiamente migiori nell’assime per l’affiatamento della loro squadra”
game in Rome on May 13. The match report of *Corriere Della Sera* on May 14 credits Mussolini for influencing the atmosphere and, to some extent, the outcome of the match. As Mussolini the stadium, the crowd is overwhelmed with jubilance and breaks into an improvised cheer of “Duce! Duce!”104 As the Princesses Maria and Mafalda of Savoy, whose presence can be read as homage to Italy’s unification, look on, the English ambassador can only respond to the mass overture with admiration and stupefaction.105 An international football match, then, is an opportunity not only for prestige and national sentiment, but also serves to inspire nationalism for Italy and Mussolini. Mussolini’s role, however, is not only limited to inspiring the crowd, as his very presence was reported to have disoriented the English players and can be credited for their poor form in the opening minutes of the match.106 This report links Mussolini closely with the football team, while also underlining his importance in fostering a spirit of national support at the match, both aspirations of Fascist sporting policy.

Unsurprisingly, both national presses find the result to be a favorable one, and both believe their national prestige was maintained or advanced through the match. The *Times of London* correspondent reveled in the “remarkable” sporting spirit of the “exciting match,” and believes the result “should prove fruitful in lessons for the further development of Italian football,” while also noting that the English gained some respect

104 “Il Duce assiste il primo incontro di calcio Italia-Inghilterra nello Stadio del Partito,” *Corriere Della Sera*, May 14, 1933, 1. “mancano pochi minuti alle 15 quando improvvisamente, tra la sopresa e il gioubilo della folla, guingio una spettatore de’eccezione”

105 ibid., “L’ambasciatore inglese e la sua signora, che sono a vicini a Mussolini, guardando in giro stupefatti e ammirati”

106 ibid., “Gli ospiti, in questo inizio sflogorante, compiuto alla presenza adl Duce che con il suo intervento ha dato all’eccezionale avvenimento un tono ancora piu’ alto, parevano completamente disorientati, dominati, costretti alla piu’ avvilento delle difese”
for the Italians’ ability.\textsuperscript{107} While noting the even result of one goal each, which “did not, on the whole, represent unfairly the run of play,” this article retains a sort of arrogance in that the English remain the dominant side in a sort of master-pupil relationship, subjugating the Italians to a position of students.\textsuperscript{108} The Italian press lauds the match as a milestone in Italian football, and welcomes the start of a sporting relationship with England, which includes a reciprocal match against the English, to be played in London in late 1934.\textsuperscript{109} The Italian newspapers also take great pride in the knowledge that the English press see the outcome of the match as fair, and thus read the status of Italy’s football team as equal to England’s, marking the end of unquestioned English hegemony.\textsuperscript{110} The Italians even begin to view themselves as teachers to the English, in that the “lesson of Rome” will force the FA to consistently select the best eleven players to play international matches if they hope to uphold their grand tradition of sporting greatness.\textsuperscript{111} In the press, the Italians can take pride in proving to be the first true test of English football ability, and their dominance in parts of the game positively contributed to national pride.\textsuperscript{112} The match report extends this sentiment further, extolling the Italian team as the example for the rest of the footballing world, as their performance on the

\textsuperscript{108} ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} “Dopo l’incontro di Roma,” \textit{Corriere Della Sera}, May 15, 1933, 4. “comunque, ora si sono iniziati i rapporti calcistici con gli Inglesi, tutto lascia ritenere che detta partita si la prima di lunga serie, tanto che e’ gia stato stabilito l’incontro di rivincita che si disputerà, come e’ stato annunciato, nel dicembre dle 1934 a Londra”
\textsuperscript{110} ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} ibid: “Tutti sono concordi nel ritenio che appresa a Roma sara’ molto utile ai dirigenti inglesi per I futuri incontri internazionali, benche’ gia questa volta l’associazione britannica abbia fatto del suo meglio per allineare un undici degno della grande tradizione inglese”
pitch reveals the way in which to compete with the English. This sentiment can also represent the wider impact of the Fascist government itself, a true test to the established hegemony of the liberal democratic tradition of Europe, exemplified by England in the interwar period. This first meeting of the two nations in international football represents a shifting in the balance of power for the footballing world, foreshadowing the importance that these matches will continue to hold throughout the decade. As the meeting between the two football teams offers a chance for the elevation of national prestige, the dynamic nature of Anglo-Italian relations throughout the 1930s reveals the same kind of attempt to seize power and influence over Continental Europe, with Italy and England both aiming to be the dominant power in the region, especially in the Mediterranean.

INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL BECOMES MORE THAN SPORT: “THE BATTLE OF HIGHBURY” - NOVEMBER 14 1934, LONDON

The return match of the series which began in May 1933 took place on November 14 1934 at Highbury Stadium in London, and has become one of the most controversial international matches ever played in Britain, and most scholarship on Anglo-Italian sporting encounters focuses on this particular match. The match, dubbed the “Battle of Highbury” in contemporary newspaper reports, characterizes much of Italian sports policy toward international football matches, and also marks an important turning point in British understanding of the political importance of international sporting occasions. By this point, The Foreign Office and Football Association were beginning to understand

113 ibid. “Ed e’per quesat anche pensiamo che oggi si sia persa la più bella occasione per imporsi finalmente davanti al mondo calcistico, acnhe con una netta- diciamo netta – vittoria sugli inglesi”
the propaganda effect of specific sporting events, and the outcome of the match in London would effectively sour relations between Italy and England.\textsuperscript{116} Italy’s recent World Cup title, Italy’s increasing prominence in European political affairs, and the familiar overtones of the match’s significance as a de facto decider of sporting prestige combined to lend the encounter an extra-sporting, military character. The memory of the previous match, the draw of May 1933 also lent weight to the characterization of the match as the decisive encounter of football primacy, which was left unresolved in Rome.\textsuperscript{117} Press interests in both nations, as well as throughout the rest of Europe, were heightened by the match, with its significant sporting and political significance. The match reveals the stark contrast in British press reporting on sport depending on the location of the match. The correspondence in May 1933 barely commented on the happenings of the match or team preparation, yet newspapers continually tracked the progress of match preparations, team characteristics, and other sporting information, eighteen months later. This contrast in media activity illuminates a cultural trend in response to English football, as little attention is paid to meetings on foreign soil, while the national team fiercely guarded their home turf, still undefeated by non-British teams in 1934.\textsuperscript{118} The Italian press, and Fascist government, was eager to build on the successes of the World Cup tournament hosted and won by Italy in the summer of 1934. Seen as a major victory, not only for Fascist sport but also as an organizational and propaganda

\textsuperscript{116} ibid, 53.  
\textsuperscript{117} Beck, “For World Footballing Honours,” 253.  
success for the regime, the politico-sporting impact “would be considerably boosted if England could be beaten for the first time on British soil a few months later.”

The World Cup Tournament, created by the international governing body of football associations, FIFA, began in 1930 as a competition for the major footballing powers of the world, in which world primacy could be determined. Regarding the positive political effects of sport, FIFA had long valued international competition as the best sort of international relations, claiming “sport is still the best League of Nations.”

The awarding of the tournament to Mussolini’s Italy in 1934 was a major success for the Fascist regime, and was seen as a reward the nationwide development of sporting programs, the campaign of stadium modernization, and recognition of success in international club competitions. Mussolini “welcomed the World Cup as a heavensent opportunity to impress domestic and external audiences with the qualities of the new Italy, as reflected through the high standard of Italian football and the efficient organization of the tournament,” and an Italian victory would be the ideal piece of propaganda to advance Italian prestige throughout the world. The tournament was latent with Fascism symbolism and propaganda, and represented the aggressive use of sport, tied closely to the central government, as an extensive of policy aims. Italy’s matches during the tournament were reported as battles, and coach Vittorio Pozzo envisioned the championship match in which players “were soldiers, the matches were

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120 Beck, “For World Footballing Honours,” 254.  
121 Beck, *Scoring For Britain*, 164.  
123 Beck, *Scoring For Britain*, 155.
battles, and the task of the team was like holding the Piave Line.”124 This sentiment, along with the political importance of many of the match sites, such as Trieste, and nationalist displays to Mussolini, directly and visibly tied football to Fascism, through its belligerent and irredentist foreign policy and mythic exaltation of Mussolini.125 The preliminary round successes of the Italian team advance them to play the final against Czechoslovakia, and the nature of those wins and the Czech win over Germany have influenced many scholars and contemporary observers to believe the matches were fixed for an Italian victory in the finals. The prospect of playing the weaker Czechs, as opposed to German allies, seemed to ensure a victory and provided a match which could be readily molded to political ambitions. On the day of the championship match, the Italian press reported that Czechoslovakia had resumed political relations with the Soviet Union, so an Italian victory would reinforce the strength of Fascism over the Communist threat.126 These claims of match fixing, combined with poor press coverage from abroad, weakened the wider propaganda effect that Mussolini intended. Yet Mussolini certainly equated the World Cup trophy as a major victory, and awarded players with monetary incentives,127 a massive trophy, gold medal, and a signed photograph for “their conquest of the football world in the name of Mussolini and Fascism.”128 Therefore, Italian football was explicitly connected with the prestige of the Fascist state, and the title of World Champions imbued the match against England in November 1934 with the qualities of an authoritative grudge match for international sporting prestige.

125 ibid, 52.
126 ibid, 57.
127 Beck, Scoring For Britain, 156.
The contemporary press publications chronicling the match reveal the dynamic nature of international sport in the 1930s, the understanding that sport is increasingly politicized, and governmental responses to evolving sporting policies. A more forceful focus was being placed on Anglo-Italian international political and sporting relations at this point, and this match presaged the future breakdown of relations, especially the efforts to create a united front against Hitler’s Germany. Italian desire to win the match at all costs, in order to maintain its status as world champion, confronted England’s fierce protection of its prestige on domestic grounds and desire to perpetuate its unique role as masters and teachers of football, as the government had recently recognized the interconnected nature of sport and national reputation. To the Italian government, this match would also serve to demonstrate the superiority of the Fascist form of government over Anglo-Saxon democracy. The antagonism between the two nations for sporting superiority erupted in a violently contested match in London, leaving players from both sides injured and the English press debating the need to continue playing these international matches. The actual impact of the match on Anglo-Italian political negotiations has been contested, but the hostile sentiment resulting from the match mirrored the disjointed aims of the two nations, as Mussolini was focused on expansionism in Africa while the British still aimed to create an Anglo-French-Italian coalition to contain Hitler’s Germany. The English “public dislike of Italy with its

132 di Candido, Calciatori in Camicia Nera, 24. “partita che doveva essere utile al regime per dimostrare al mondo che il fascismo italiano era superiore alla democrazia inglese, anche in questa disciplina della quale gli anglosassoni si professavano maestri”
fascist swagger and pretensions to supremacy in England’s national sport may have been an aggravating factor” in the breakdown of diplomacy between the two nations, preceding the breakdown of the Stresa Front negotiations in April 1935 and the backlash from the Abyssinian invasion. The extra-sporting nature of international football matches, especially between Italy and England, was no longer in question, and both national presses began to propagate such sentiment, as in a match report titled “The Battle of Highbury: From our War Correspondent,” from an English newspaper illustrates.

English presses recognized the threat to their football hegemony posed by the Italian squad, and aim to protect their reputation in the weeks preceding the match, while hinting that a win would galvanize their claims to international sporting dominance. Whether extolling the strengths of the English team, distinguishing England from the Continent, embracing militaristic language in a match report, or passing judgment on Italian footballing style, English newspapers were writing far more about this match than the one contested in Rome eighteen months earlier. A combined reading of *Manchester Guardian*, *The Times of London*, and *The Observer* revealed less than ten articles on the Italy-England match which took place in Rome in May 1933, yet the same three publications contribute more than twice as many articles in the buildup to the match on November 14, with the *Manchester Guardian* alone publishing thirteen articles on football in Italy, the English team, or the upcoming match throughout the month. The increased nature of newspaper publication illuminates the high value which England places on international football matches taking place on home soil, but can also be read as

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part of the evolution of wider British sporting policy. The number of articles on Italian football success, sporting policy, and the match against English approaches parity with more traditional writing on international relations and global economics, revealing wider interest in international sport, especially its ability to foster national prestige. The interest in Italian policy is evident in the discussion of Fascist training of youth, highly militarized from a young age in which "there is to be no division of civilian and military life." This article is followed by one depicting the celebrations at the awarding of the prize for the best child soldier in Italy, a silver bayonet which symbolizes "to the youths belonging to the pre-military category the warlike spirit of our infantry, of which they will form the largest contingent." Comparing this correspondence on life in Italy to the debates in *The Times* eighteen months earlier, in which members of parliament could not agree on the impact of Fascism on Italy, reveals the increasing curiosity towards Italy, especially the way in which Fascism is implemented into social programs. Two articles, which appear a week later, discuss Italy’s sporting policies, especially those on football, and the ways in which Fascist ideals have been instilled into a nationalized version of the game. Manager Vittorio Pozzo’s role as the sole team selector, contrasted to the British use of a committee, as well as his desire to instill a strong sense of teamwork, reflect on the evolution of Italian football away from its English roots. A longer article appearing the next day chronicles that Italian development, by which “the game has now become truly national, with characteristics particular to the country.” Discussing the policies

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138 “Italy Under Fascism Ten Years of Progress,” *The Times of London*, May 4, 1933, 8.
139 “Italy’s Selector,” *Manchester Guardian*, November 13, 1934, 4.
140 “Italy’s Football Progress,” *Manchester Guardian*, November 14, 1934, 3.
implanted by the Fascist state, such as the change to the term calcio, the xenophobic nationalization of the Italian club competition, or the necessary salute to Il Duce at the beginning and end of each match, this correspondent informs the English nation to the distinct view of sport in Italy.\footnote{ibid.} The article even contrasts styles of play, pitting “cold English science” against the “enterprise” and “team smoothness of the Italians,” to further demonstrate the complete separation of English and Italian approaches to football.\footnote{ibid.} Appearing on the day of the match at Highbury, the article notes that in Italy, “the fame of the country rests on international achievement” and reveals the “impression that not only in England and Italy, but also in other countries, more is at stake than any single sports encounter warrants.”\footnote{ibid.} The correspondent has correctly identified the Continental European tendency to imbue football matches with political importance, yet rejects these ideas as irrational, representing the complex nature of English understanding of the politicization of sport. By dismissing the linkage to national prestige, separating England and its view of football from the rest of the Continent, and identifying the close linkage of the Italian national football team to the Fascist government, this article presents many of the main trends evident in the English press and national consciousness toward international sport in 1934.

At the same time, as part of the celebration of the twelfth anniversary of the implementation of Fascist government in Italy, Italian newspapers were reflecting on the role of sport in the regime and its progress in mass education. Linking sport to national aims and revealing its close connection to the Fascist program for Italy, Corriere Della

\footnote{ibid.}
Sera describes the prominence of Italian sport as a unique alternative to most nations, who only view sport as a means of exercise. In Italy, however, sport holds a real national function, for military preparation, spiritual force, and character formation for the entire Italian population. The article continues to reveal that Italy has become the center of the active world, through the efficient organization of the masses and especially in footballing ability, as the World Cup and European Cup championships prove the dominance and superiority of the Italian nation. Most importantly, this article links sporting success directly to political success, in that sport is a form of high politics in which any sporting win serves as a political triumph as well. The timing of this article is important, as it follows arguably the most successful period of Italian sporting achievement, capped by hosting and winning the World Cup Tournament, and links that success directly to the new elevated role of sport in Fascist policies. Situating this article amid the coverage of the twelfth anniversary of Italian Fascism, and only weeks before the match against England, viewed as the most important international in Italian sporting

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144 “L’educazione delle masse nel dodecisimo anno fascista,” Corriere Della Sera, October 25, 1934, 5. “la concezione fascista e’ originale, esempio e non derivazione. Gli Americans, gli’Inglesi, i Tedeschi hanno considerato lo sport come una gioia dei muscoli e dell’organismo”

145 ibid; “Lo sport non e’ piu giuoco o passatempo; ma preparazione guerriera, forza spirituale che rinsalda e forma il carattere”; “Così lo sport ha assunto veramente, sotto i segni dei Littorio, una compattezza ed una funzione nazionali”

146 ibid; Il nostro Paese i divenuto il centro dell’attività mondiale, in parrechie occasioni: e nelle prove di squadra, quelle che meglio palesano l’efficienza delle organizzazioni e delle masse, abbiamo dominato senza lasciar dubbi sull’esito, poiche’ nel calcio non soltanto vincemmo il campionato, am anche la Coppa Europa, conferma della nostra superiorita”

147 ibid; “Dalla vicenda sportive e’ scaturita la verita’ politica, la significazione nazionale”; “Lo sport e’ anche una forza politica, nel senso piu elevato”
history\textsuperscript{148} or the greatest competitive match ever played,\textsuperscript{149} lends extra significance to the already politically charged event. Two days later, \textit{Corriere Della Sera} again comments on the progress of sport in Italy and its importance to political motives\textsuperscript{150}, focusing on the privileged nature of football in Fascist sporting policy, which has earned its honored position by winning the World Cup for Mussolini.\textsuperscript{151} The World Cup victory, along with the success of Bologna FC in the European Cup, against strong teams from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Austria, reveals the boosts given to Fascist propaganda exclusively through footballing successes.\textsuperscript{152} \textit{L’Ambrosiano} also publishes an article in this period which reveals the truly privileged nature of the elite athletes of Fascist Italy, disclosing the bonuses and pensions that athletes receive for sporting successes in Italy, such as 10,000 lire for anyone who achieves the title of world champion.\textsuperscript{153} The prospect of monetary prestige awarded to the players was also directed toward the next match, as

\textsuperscript{148} “Mentre si gioca sul campo in Highbury,,” \textit{L’Ambrosiano}, November 14, 1934, 1. “Nessun incontro calcistico nella storia sportive ha mai assunto un importanza pari a quella dell’odierno duello di Highbury perché i ‘maestri della palla rotonda’ ricevono oggi gli azzurri che pochi mesi o sono hanno saputo conquistare attraverso battaglie durissime e superbe il titolo di campioni del mondo”;
\textsuperscript{149} “L’incontro Italia-Inghilterra,” \textit{Corriere Della Sera} November 7, 1934, 4. “Il pensiero di Meisl: ‘La più grande competizione di tutti i tempi’”
\textsuperscript{150} “L’ascesa dello sport fascista nei fatti e nelle cifre,” \textit{Corriere Della Sera}, October 27, 1934, 4. “I motivi politici che valorizzano le discipline sportive sono stati già’ ampiamente illustrati”
\textsuperscript{151} ibid; “Lo sport del calcio merita il posto d’onore. La squadra nazionale italiana infatti ha conquistato nel maggio scorso, allo stadio di Roma, alla presenza del Duce, il campionato del mondo”
\textsuperscript{152} ibid; “Le grande vittoria ottenuta appunto nel campionato del mondo ha dato indubbamente un nuovo fortissimo impulso alla propaganda”; “confermare in modo decisivo la vittoria dei calciatori azzurri nel piu’ grande torneo del mondo l’affermazione ottenuta dal Bologna nella Coppa Europa a cui partecipavano le piu’ forte squadre dell’Ungheria e della Cecoslovacchia”
\textsuperscript{153} “Il Regime per i suoi Atleti,” \textit{L’Ambrosiano}, October 31, 1934, 4. “i seguenti premi a favore dei figli degli atleti: Polizza vita di lire 10.000 in favore del figlio che ha, o che avra’, l’atleta che nell’Anno XII conquistera’ un titolo di campione mondiale. Polizza vita di lire 5000, come sopra, a chi migliorera’un primato internazionale”
“Mussolini’s offer of huge bonuses to his team for the Highbury game in 1934 was only a reflection of the huge prestige which accrued to any country beating England.” The description of Italian football prestige as directly linked to its success in international matches, especially the ones played in 1934, lends to the growing importance of the upcoming match against England to be played in London.

One trend in the reporting of the match that has most influenced scholarship is the militaristic language used to describe the match, and the way in which the physical nature of the match itself affected perceptions of international sporting encounters. As was evident in a close reading of publications on the England-Italy match of May 1933, the Italian press was far more likely to use aggressive language to describe football matches, in attempts to link international sporting prestige with expansionist military sentiment. By November 1934, however, English newspapers have adapted the same writing style to question the sporting nature of the game and tactics pursued by the Italian team. In their match report of November 15, the Manchester Guardian consistently refer to the roughness of the Italian players as unnecessary, while insinuating the Italians are not even aware of the rules of the game, having “peculiar ideas of a legitimate tackle.” These judgments, along with reports of the multiple injuries to the English players and the comments of the referee that Italians need to “learn to control themselves” present a critical view of Italian football as completely inferior and unsatisfactory in regards to

155 “L’ascesa dello sport fascista nei fatti e nelle cifre,” Corriere Della Sera, October 27, 1934, 4. “L’eccelenza del calcio italiano e’ offerta del resto pure dai risultati complessivi degli incontri internazionali disputati nell’anno XII”
156 “Italian Footballers Lose: too Much Rough Play by Visitors,” Manchester Guardian, November 15, 1934, 4.
standards of the self-proclaimed masters of the game.157 The articles published after the game, which record the thoughts of one English player who felt “it was not a game of football, it was a battle,”158 and the previously noted headline from a “War Correspondent” lent to the famous characterization of the match as the “Battle of Highbury.” The idea of the match as a battle is evident even before the rough play, as the Italian press viewed Highbury Stadium as a British fortress, consistent with the fierce English desire to stay unbeaten in Britain.159 As reprinted in Italian newspapers, the English press has come to expect a belligerent style from the Italians, who will approach the match as a battle.160 The fervor that followed the match lasted for weeks was so great that the editors of the Guardian felt the need to publish a series of editorials calling for calm while reinstating traditional English views on international sporting competition. Noting the ideal role of international football matches to “contribute to the cause of peace and friendship” and dismissing the “silly talk about national prestige depending on the result of one match,” the editorial reflects England’s conflicted view of international sport at this point.161 Somewhat naïve to the politicized nature of football on the Continent, this editor cannot fathom “regarding England’s 3-2 victory yesterday over a gallant Italian team in an Association football match at Highbury as either a triumph for the British National Government or a threat to the position of Mussolini in Italy,” and

157 ibid.
160 “ITALIA-INGHILTERRA: Alarmi britannici,” L’Ambrosiano, November 1, 1934 2. “E’ ovvio che i giocatori italiani sono decisi a trasformare l’incontro in una grande battaglia per tutta la durata dei 90 minuti”
attempts to discredit those sentiments, “in spite of excitable newspaper articles.”\textsuperscript{162} This call for calm is in direct opposition to the role of Italian journalism, whose articles extol the actions of the Italian players as direct representatives of Italian government, fighting in the name of Il Duce.\textsuperscript{163} In place of such belligerence and politicization, the \textit{Guardian} publishes another editorial, a full week after the match, debating whether these matches against Continental sides should continue, as “the Continent as a whole seems slow to see where sport leaves its domain and is obscured by nationalism and other rivalries.”\textsuperscript{164} The article reveals a developing rift in England between those who see no use for these matches and those who believe the English team has an obligation as “football missionaries” to continue exporting and teaching the game.\textsuperscript{165} Therefore, the editorial reveals again the conflicted view towards Continental approaches to football, as the English only begin to realize the politicized nature of sport. The Italian press also employs warlike language to describe the match, both in the preparation of the team and the nature of the play. While noting that the English squad may be the strongest ever assembled in the interwar years, the Italian team is regarded as more combative and therefore more dangerous to English prestige.\textsuperscript{166} As the day of the match nears, the use of such charged language increases, characterizing the day as a battle between the two

strongest forces, as the Italians are enthusiastic to fight for prestige.\textsuperscript{167} The most obvious linkage between football and battle appears after the match, when Italian newspapers reveal the English shock at the warlike nature of the fixture, and extol the value of the match. Far from admitting defeat, \textit{Corriere Della Sera} reports the excellent nature of the result, calling the Fascist athletes men of battle, who fought well, attacking quickly and capably and nearly won the match under difficult conditions.\textsuperscript{168} The sharp distinction between Italian praise and expectation of belligerence in football and the English shock and disbelief at the rough nature of play illuminates their vastly different understandings of international football. The extremely physical nature of the match engendered characterizations of battle and a debate of the real worth of international competition in the British press, while an Italian defeat was met with numerous articles praising the fighting spirit of the team and encouraging Italians to rally behind their squad, who still possessed the title of World Champions.

These distinct views of international football competition highlight another major trend in the publications of the period, the distinction between England and Continental Europe. Whether discussing styles of play, the perceived importance of the match, or the politico-sporting connections of international football, both Italian and English presses consistently illuminate the rift between the Continent and the British Isles. References to

\textsuperscript{167} “Gli ‘azzurri’ nella roccaforte d’Albione,” \textit{L’Ambrosiano}, November 13, 1934, 1. \textit{“le due piu’ forte squadre calcistiche del mondo inizieranno la loro battaglia”; “l’entusiasmo fra i nostri giocatori i quali non vendono l’ora di scendere in campo e dare battaglia agli inglesi”}

\textsuperscript{168} “Il valore e l’ardimento degli atleti fascisti: calorosamente ammirati ed esaltati dall’ stampa internazionale,” \textit{Corriere Della Sera}, November 16, 1934, 4. \textit{“Gli atleti fascisti sono uomini di battaglia, di combattimento”; “Il loro controllo sul pallone e’ sorprendente ed entusiastemente quando attaccano con una velocita’ e una capacita’ di smistamento che possono travolgere in poche battute in modo decisivo”}
England’s “splendid isolation” are plentiful, and mirror the non-interventionism and protectionism of contemporary English foreign policy before the Abyssinian Crisis. Italian papers view the closely contested nature of the match, in which the Italians fought back from 3-0, playing with only ten men, to a respectable final score of 3-2, as the end of that British isolation as the premier sporting nation. In the discussion of the match as a confrontation between Great Britain and the Continent, football again takes on an extra-sporting significance, but in a more general nature, not only between the two nations participating on the field. International football reveals larger sentiments of English superiority on the European scale, as English national prestige is tied to sport, if not understood as such in England proper. The “teacher-student” relationship between England and Continental football can represent larger sentiments of English dominance in European affairs, represented by the proceedings and results of the Paris Peace Conference. Continental presses also comment on the wider implications of the England-Italy match of November 1934, as political newspapers in France understand the match to be the decisive word on the clash of English and Continental football. These newspaper reports reveal an antagonism toward the English, as the nations of Continental

171 “Gli azzurri incontrano oggi i maestri del calcio inglese,” Corriere Della Sera, November 14, 1934, 4.
172 “La squadra inglese è formata,” Corriere Della Sera, November 6, 1934, 4.
173 “Allarmistici commenti inglesi e incitamenti a rinforzare la squadra per il 14 novembre,” Corriere Della Sera, November 2 1934, 4.
174 “Ma anche la stampa politica segue con interessa l’imminente contesa che costituirà, si può dire, un definitivo confronto fra il calcio continentale e quello d’oltre Manica”
Europe would prefer an Italian win, and would claim it as a victory for the Continent over England. Similar statements of solidarity are evident from Continental presses, especially in their synopses of the result of the match. Both L’Ambrosiano and Corriere Della Sera publish reports from the major newspapers across Europe, revealing multinational support and respect for the “combative spirit” of the Italians in the “heroic battle” between the English team and the representatives of Continental football. Even the French president of FIFA, Jules Rimet, recognizes the importance of the match and assures that the Italians will distinguish the strength of Continental football. By highlighting the differences in style and demeanor of football across Europe, these Continental newspapers add to the military characterization of this Italy-England match, lending credence to the Italian concept of sporting success as political success. A Swiss correspondence reveals the notion of the match as a real world championship, as England was not present at the World Cup tournament in Italy. Revealing England’s desire to protect its national reputation as the motivation behind England’s sporting absence at

175 “Ottimismo ma non troppo,” Corriere Della Sera, November 10, 1934, 4. “il prossimo incontro e’ molto discusso in quasi tutti ambienti calcistici del Continente, dove gli Inglesi non sono i favoriti. In realta’ possiamo dire che le Nazioni di Continente si preparano ad acclamare una vittoria degli Italiani”

176 “Il valore degli ‘azzurri’ a Highbury negli ammirati commenti della stampa estera,” L’Ambrosiano, November 15, 1934, 1. “valore eroico”-“Il grande spirito combattivo degli Italiani ha dominato tutto il secondo tempo”

177 ibid; “Entusiastici rilievi elvetici”-“La vittoria non ha coronato gli sforzi ammirevoli degli Italiani ma si deve dire che essi hanno rappresentato con onore il calcio continentale alla cui Potenza e perfezione, gli inglesi oggi dovranno ben credere”

178 “I calciatori italiani alla volta di Londra dopo l’ultimo allenamento allo Stadio Mussolini,” Corriere Della Sera, November 9, 1934, 4. “che l’incontro e’ molto aperto e che gli Italiani defenderanno col valore che li distingue il calcio del Continente”
international tournaments of the Continent 179, this claim is equally relevant to wider English foreign policy aims throughout the decade, especially in the botched attempts to maintain national prestige through the debates over the Abyssinian invasion in 1935, as England inadvertently alienated Italy, pushing Mussolini toward eventual alliance with Hitler. 180 This policy of protectionism and non-intervention is in complete opposition to Mussolini’s use of international sporting competition as a means for displaying Italian strength abroad. The reactions of Italians in London, and especially those of English Fascists, lend credence to Mussolini’s attempts to increase prominence and visibility outside Italian borders. Through efforts to meet the Italians as they arrive in London and organizing a popular vigil to show support for the Italian athletes, the English Fascists understand the importance of international football and its role in the Fascist government in a way most Englishmen have yet to embrace.181 Therefore, the foreign policy significance of the match reflects the successful projection of Italian interest abroad, yet also reveals the tardiness of British policymakers to understand the value of these international sporting occasions to Continental nations.

By illuminating underlying animosities between England and Continental Europe, with Italy as its great represent, the “Battle of Highbury” serves as an example of the pinnacle of the military nature which international football held for both Italy and

179 “Mentre si gioca sul campo di Highbury,” L’Ambrosiano, November 14, 1934, 1. “Gli inglesi hanno rifiutato di partecipare alla Coppa del Mondo preferendo di non rischiare il loro riputazione sul campo estero”
181 “L’attesa a Londra per la partita del 14,” L’Ambrosiano November 7, 1934, 4. “Il Fascio di Londra, come apprendiamo, ha organizzato un veglione popolare in onore della squadra azzurra per la sera stessa del 14 novembre. Ad esso sono invitati i membri della colonia (italiana)”
England. Although the Italian team could not produce a famous victory on English soil to supplement their World Cup title, the match was a huge success in projecting values of Fascism abroad as well as providing an instance around which to rally nationalist sentiment. For England, the match proved to be a defining moment in international sporting policy, sparking a national debate on international football matches, weighing potential threats to national prestige against the continuation of the cultural imperialist benefits of being the creator and exporter of the world’s game.\(^{182}\) A test of the previous policies favoring protectionism of prestige, the “Battle of Highbury” forced the British government to finally take control over international sport, in the great attempt to prevent sport from souring relations with Germany as had happened with Italy. Their match against the German national team in 1935 revealed a direct alignment with the overall appeasement policy in regard to Nazi Germany, and the calm proceedings of the match were seen as a success in politico-sporting policy.\(^ {183}\) The influence of the Italy match in 1934 forced England to finally adopt a policy toward sport, whose “main strategy would be to intervene to ensure non-intervention, that is, to arrange things so that Britain did not offend other powers through sport and to keep the British Government away from direct involvement.”\(^ {184}\) Just as Fascist Italy utilized international sport to demonstrate the strength of Fascist-style governance, England used sport to uphold democracy, such that “success in sport gave the impression of a physically vigorous nation and countered fascist notions of a racially degenerate democracy whilst stressing the special role

\(^{182}\) Crolley and Hand, *Football and European Identity: Historical Narratives Through the Press*, 17.


\(^{184}\) ibid.
accorded to moral qualities in sport.”¹⁸⁵ While progressing quickly from complete
ignorance and dismissal of the political aspects of sport to a somewhat “official” sporting
policy, Britain’s leaders opted not to create such a transparent connection between
government and sport as existed in the Continental dictatorships. The Italian bureaucratic
framework of sporting organizations under the centralized Fascist government can be
contrasted with the English system, in which “international sport should promote
goodwill and British prestige – bad publicity abroad arising from sport was to be avoided
at all costs – but this should be done behind the scenes by dropping a word in the ear of
the main sporting bodies via the ‘old boy’ network.”¹⁸⁶ Matching this repressed
connection between sport and government existed the more general aim, in line with
traditional attitudes toward sport as a marker of British prestige “using a hitherto
untapped cultural resource: the unique position of Britain in the world as the founders of
modern sport,” and especially its role in creating and distributing football throughout
Europe and the rest of the world.¹⁸⁷ As the Football Association and Foreign Office
worked more closely together, British sporting policies became relevant in the decade in
which nations such as Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany would attempt to exploit
international sport as a means of increasing prestige, exerting nationalist sentiment, and
as a direct arm of governmental foreign policy.

¹⁸⁵ ibid, 62.
¹⁸⁶ ibid, 58.
¹⁸⁷ ibid, 63.
INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL AS HIGH DIPLOMACY, PLAYERS AS AMBASSADORS—MAY 13 1939, MILAN

The last match contested between England and Italy in the interwar period took place on May 13 1939, and represents the high point of the politicization of international football, as the fully-developed sporting policies of both Britain and Fascist Italy are evident in the coverage of the match and in later scholastic discussion. In the wake of the negative political impact of the “Battle of Highbury” in November 1934, the Football Association and Foreign Office began to work more closely to develop a policy through which to approach international sporting encounters, especially those including continental nations, with a special emphasis on Anglo-German and Anglo-Italian fixtures. Italy continued to succeed in international football competition in the duration between these matches, winning the 1936 Berlin Olympics tournament and the 1938 World Cup Tournament held in Paris. These victories cemented Italy’s place as the most dominant team in international competition in the 1930s, while revealing that the Italian national team could win tournaments outside of Fascist Italy. As part of its new policy toward international competition, England participated in multiple competitions on the European Continent since the last meeting with Italy, sending a strictly amateur “Great Britain” side to the 1936 Berlin Olympics and recording a win against a “Rest of Europe” team as part of the celebrations of FIFA’s 75th anniversary.\footnote{Beck, “For World Footballing Honours,” 255.} As Italy expounded on its previous international successes and England maintained its high sporting reputation, the match in Milan was soon billed as the match of the century.\footnote{“I preparativi allo Stadio di San Siro per l’‘incontro del secolo’ “L’Ambrosiano, May 9, 1939, 5.} Not only important in regards to it sporting significance, the match, in which “the world’s championship was the prize,”
forced an important assessment from the Football Association and the Foreign Office, since “the worsening international situation, in conjunction with Italy’s recent footballing successes, gave it even greater perceived importance than the two previous fixtures.”¹⁹⁰ The joint FA and Foreign Office evaluation of the importance of the match, both political and sporting, demonstrates the development of a successful and useful British sporting policy.

Understanding the role of sport in “the widespread use of propaganda as a ‘weapon of aggression’ by Germany and Italy,” British officials finally realized the “need for counter-measures to uphold national interests and prestige in the wider world,” and looked to sport to obtain those objectives.¹⁹¹ The establishment of a sporting policy, in which the Foreign Office and Football Association evaluated the propaganda value of each match, aligns with overall foreign policy initiatives under Neville Chamberlain. Chamberlain’s appeasement was only extended to a restoration of Anglo-Italian relations when diplomatic overtures toward Nazi Germany, aimed at general settlement with the Central European power, deteriorated past a point of repair. Characterized by the effort to make a diplomatic bargain with Italy in the wake of the invasion of Abyssinia, Chamberlain approached relations toward Italy “with something resembling abandon” in order to keep disrupt any alliance between the two European dictatorships, which he regarded as an essential measure of any détente toward Germany.¹⁹² Sport became a cover for diplomatic overtures and propaganda focused toward Germany, as Vansittart and Lord Halifax visited Berlin through sporting fixtures in 1936 and 1937, and Britain

¹⁹¹ Beck, Scoring for Britain, 239.
developed a clear understanding of the diplomatic nature of international sport. The Foreign Office and Football Association began to collaborate on policies regarding sport, linking their political and sporting activities to reflect current policy aims. Just as the threatening events of the first half of 1939, including the German occupation of Prague in March, the Italian invasion of Albania in early April, and the German threats to Poland merited a revision of British foreign policy, the Football Association responded with “footballing sanctions” by cancelling matches against German club teams to be played in the summer. While Italy escaped similar sanctions, the tense international political climate affected the preparations for the match, as both countries realized the propaganda possibilities of the match. As the Italian government “regarded the event as a test in which the prowess of the new Italy would be matched against the country where football has its home,” the Fascists arranged for 400 fans from Malta to be transported to watch the match to witness the clash between Italy and England, focusing the strained relationship between the two nations over the small Mediterranean island to one sporting occasion. The English government viewed the match as an opportunity to strengthen and revive the faltering nature of Anglo-Italian relations, and thus the FA officials who traveled to Milan with the players reminded them of the importance of sporting behavior, urging them to maintain level heads, expect rough play from the Italians who valued a win above all else, and to “avoid retaliation regardless of provocation.”

In this new sporting policy, athletes participating in international sporting events, such as the footballers traveling to Milan to play the Italians, became ambassadors for

193 Beck, Scoring for Britain, 242.
195 ibid, 255-6.
196 Beck, Scoring for Britain, 251-2.
Britain, projecting positive values of sportsmanship and fair play.\textsuperscript{197} Their good behavior, both on and off the football pitch was of utmost importance to both the Foreign Office and the Football Association, as the presence of British citizens acted to maintain prestige and friendly relations in a country where outright political propaganda would be heavily censored or simply disallowed.\textsuperscript{198} To the Foreign Office, in particular, the unique nature of football as the national game of both nations as well as tied closely to Fascism, “offered an effective method of British projection throughout Italy in terms of providing a rare opportunity to reach all sections of Italian society with the active compliance of both the fascist authorities and the media.”\textsuperscript{199} These sentiments reveal the culmination of the long development of English policy, by which they not only recognized the importance of the match to Italian government and media officials, but also used the very popularity of football in Italy as a disguise for effective counter-propaganda. The football players themselves became the most important actors in this propaganda exercise, and their behavior on this European tour, consisting of matches against Italy, Yugoslavia, and Romania, closely resembled the actions of professional diplomats. The Italian press reports of the actions of the English football team in Milan could be confused for the reports of ambassadors on an official diplomatic visit. Accompanied by officials of the Football Association and specially invited English journalists, the English football team arrived in Milan, to be taken by government officials on a tour of the city and invited as

\textsuperscript{197} Beck, “For World Footballing Honours,” 259.
\textsuperscript{198} ibid, 258.
\textsuperscript{199} Beck, \textit{Scoring for Britain}, 253.
guests of the Italian football body FIGC to a ceremony in their honor. The next day, the players toured the newly renovated stadium in which the match will be played, then were taken to various other local attractions on their continuing tour, while the English FA officials are constantly the guests of the FIGC on their own tours and dinners. Both the Italian and English football associations are aware of the importance of these international matches, and take extra precautions to maintain a friendly relationship in the days preceding the match. Corriere Della Sera reports on the actions of the Italian football directors to create a rich program of festivities for the English athletes and the accompanying officials, even noting a royal presence in the tour, the brother of the Queen mother. The actions of the Italian football executives to create a program to honor the English football representatives, as well as the English link to royalty in the group disclose the undeniable linkage between international football and politics in the two governments. These diplomatic activities continue in the days preceding the match, as after a practice the English team gathered to place wreaths on monuments to Fascist Caduti, before joining the Italian players at a banquet hosted by the Italian-English

201 ibid. “Per giovedi e’ in programma una gita sul lago di Como a Cadenabbis, con visita alla Villa Carlotta. La F.I.G.C. offrirà una colazione a Villa d’Este ed al ritorno, a Cernobbio, avra’ luogo un te’ offerto dall’Ente turistico locale. In serata, a Milano, i dirigenti inglesi saranno ospiti della F.I.G.C.”
202 “I calciatori inglesi arrivano domani,” Corriere Della Sera, May 9, 1939, 4. “I nostri dirigenti hanno infatti prestabilito un preciso e ricco programma di festeggiamenti per onorare gli atleti e i membri della Football Association di cui com’e’ noto fanno parte molte grandi personalita’ inglesi e che e’ presieduta dal conte d’Athione, fratello della Regina madre d’Inghilterra”
The banquet provided the perfect occasion to salute the friendly sporting relationship between the two nations and for an FA official to express the feelings of gratitude of the English players for their warm welcome in Italy as well as toasting to the continued successes of the two nations. These warm sentiments of friendship and well-wishing provide a sharp contrast to the shocked reactions to the events of the match in London 1934, which resulted in a drastic rethinking of international sporting matches. Thus, British views of international football progressed dramatically in five years between the “Battle of Highbury” and the match of 1939, in which the Foreign Office “welcomed the match’s seemingly beneficial extra-sporting consequences.” The clearest linkage between Chamberlain’s foreign policy and the actions of the England football team in Italy occurs as the English players give the Fascist salute during the playing of the Italian national anthem at the beginning of the match as well as when the match is finished. Viewed from the diplomatic context through which English players act as ambassadors in an effort to create effective political propaganda in line with foreign policy goals, “the English gesture of giving the Fascist salute, both before and after the match” was seen as a successful action, “greatly appreciated” by the

203 “L’attività degli ospiti e l’arrivo degli azzurri,” Corriere Della Sera, May 12, 1939, 4. “Dopo l’allenamento, la squadra inglese deporrà una corona al monumento dei Caduti e una corona al sacrario dei Caduti fascisti; alle 11.30 sara’ ricevuta dal podesta’ a Palazzo Marino e in serata prendera’ parte un pranzo offerto dell’Associazione italo-inglese di cultura.”

204 “Italia e Inghilterra si battono oggi a Milano,” Corriere Della Sera, May 13, 1939, 4. “Alla fine il signor Celli, vice-presidente dell’Associazione, ha ringraziato i convenuti brindando all’amicizia sportiva italo-inglese. Ha preso quindi la parola il dirigente britannico signor Glanville, esprimendo la gratitudine dei calciatori inglesi per il senso di fervido comeratismo che essi hanno trovato in Italia e brindando al sempre maggiori successi dei due Paesi in ogni campo.”

Italians fans.\textsuperscript{206} The action of saluting the government of the host country represents a policy of the new British viewpoint on international sport, yet the incident in Italy failed to create the wave of controversy following a similar action in which the English team gave the Nazi salute in an England-Germany match in Berlin, and was viewed as successful in contributing to Anglo-Italian relations.\textsuperscript{207}

While much of the newspaper coverage focuses on the positive aspects of the match, such as the positive sporting relationship between England and Italy and the friendly spirit between the two, the press continues the consistent trend of billing the match as important for national prestige, whether political or sporting. The past successes of the Italian team and the closely contested matches between the two nations in 1933 and 1934 accentuated the atmosphere surrounding the match, which some journalists likened to a World Cup final.\textsuperscript{208} The Italian press was much more likely to recognize the significance of the match in determining world football superiority, but this sentiment also reflects on the disparate nature of press writing on the match. As in 1933, Italian papers publish far more articles on the upcoming match, as \textit{Corriere Della Sera} and \textit{L'Ambrosiano} collectively publish over twenty articles on the match ranging from mid-April through May, while a combined reading of the \textit{Manchester Guardian} and \textit{Times of London} reveals only four articles directly related to the match between the two nations to be played in Milan. While the English papers focus on the friendly nature of the game,

\textsuperscript{206} “Italy versus England: Teams for To-Day’s Game,” \textit{Manchester Guardian}, May 13, 1939, 19.
\textsuperscript{207} Beck, “For World Footballing Honours,” 256-7.
\textsuperscript{208} “\textit{I calciatori inglesi arrivano domani,}” \textit{Corriere Della Sera}, May 9, 1939, 4. “\textit{E’ superfluo rivelare che tutta l’attenzione degli sportive brittanici e’ concentrata sulla prova di Milano che viene considerate come la ‘finalissima’ del campionato del mondo di calcio detenuto degli Italiani}”
praising the impartial and calm nature of the 60,000 spectators in their match reports, the Italian press focuses more intensely on the preparations for the match and the implications of the result. The comments of players, such as the English captain Hapgood, and journalists examining the match return to the distinction between English and Continental football, with Italy as its prime practitioner, and describe the upcoming match as a test between the two systems and styles. This realization of the differing natures of sport in England and on the Continent was somewhat of a new development, as the 1934 World Cup Tournament can be credited as the first instance in which national styles become more strictly defined. The development of an Italian national style of play can be closely linked to the nationalizing efforts of the Fascist government, reflected in the ways in which the Italian team represent Fascist ideals as “the mediation of different playing styles (perceived as representative of national identities) constitutes a debate, a battle between discourses, a conflict regarding the correct interpretation of the essence of football itself.” The match reveals the distinction of the two nations in their approach to football, and mirrors the growing political divide between the two nations, evident in the deterioration of Anglo-Italian relations and the British concern for the contemporary development of the Italo-German Pact.  

211 Crolley and Hand, Football and European Identity, 12.  
as an English export, the Fascist Government evolves a new system of political
governance, detracting further from the liberal democracy that represented by Britain.

Revealing the continued connection between international football success and
overall Italian prestige and its role in galvanizing the Italian fans to the Italian nation, the
press reports of this match in 1939 demonstrate the importance of any international
football match to the Fascist program to inculcate nationalism throughout the country.213
The match takes on importance for international football prestige, and the atmosphere of
the preparations for the match are noted as unprecedented, due to the recent successes of
the Italian team in World Cup and Olympic championships, their superb technique and
warlike style, and the unique nature of any match against England, the only side who can
really test Italy’s dominance.214 Viewing the English squad travelling to Italy as the best
representatives of British football skill, the press finds it obvious that Italy provides the
only threat to English dominance, and finds it an honor to be considered “public enemy
number one.”215 The connection between the Fascist government and the preparations for

degli azzurri aveva sempre risonanza internazionale, contribuiva ad accrescere il nostro
prestigio, a consolidare una fama gia’ saldamente acquisita, ma non riusciva piu’ o
meglio non riusciva sempre a galvanizzare la folla, a sollevare le ondate d’entusisamo di
un tempo”
fatiche degli organizzatori,” Corriere Della Sera, May 4, 1939, 4. “Se l’importanza d’un
avvenimento sportive si puo’ misurare dall’interessamento e dall’aspettativa che esso
suscita, dall’affannosa corsa alle prenotazioni per lo spettacolo, bisogna confessare che
difficilmente si trova nei nostri ricordi un avvenimento della portata del prossimo
confronto calcistico Italia-Inghilterra”; “Gli azzurri, ormai carichi di tuuti gli allori,
campioni del mondo, campioni olimpionici, riconfermavano praticamente a ogni nuovo
confronto la loro superiorita’ tecnica, la loro maggior completezza come capacita’
stilistica e come baldanza guerriera.”
215 L’Inghilterra ha mandato in Italia la sua squadra piu’ forte per superare gli ‘azzurri’
campioni del mondo,” L’Ambrosiano, May 10, 1939, 5. “Segno evidente che per essi,
calcisticamente parlando, il ‘nemico pubblico numero uno’ e’ rappresentato
the match are also evident in the journalism on the renovation of the San Siro Stadium in Milan, the venue for the England-Italy encounter. The renovation, a continuation of the massive stadium-building program of the 1930s, was designed to increase the seating capacity, allowing 60,000 fans to join in unison to support their national team. The accelerated pace of the renovation, completed just in time for the match of May 13, represents the style of Fascist sporting policy, the global vanguard not only in competitive successes and vigor but also in the perfection of organization.216 The praise of Fascist organizational ability is also extended to the efficiency with which fans and other traffic will be directed to the crowded Stadium, located in a busy neighborhood of Milan.217 The Fascist style of efficient organization is key, then, to the success of the FIGC in administering and hosting such important events, from these friendly matches to a World Cup tournament. Fascist values are even furthered connected to the actions around Italian national football, however, as even the preparation of the team in practice session can be aligned with the discipline and organization characteristic of Fascism.218 The military language which characterized the connections between Italian football and

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216 “I calciatori inglese arrivano domani,” Corriere Della Sera, May 9, 1939, 4. “Ogni cosa di svolge dunque con perfetto a veloce ritmo, secondo lo stile dello sport fascista che i oggi all’avanguardia nel mondo non soltanto per valore agonistico, ma anche per perfezione organizzato”

217 “La squadra inglese sara’ a Milano,” L’Ambrosiano, May 9, 1939, 5. “ la sistemazione della circolazione e dell’accesso allo Stadio, in modo che non vi sia alcun incommuniente da lamentare, e che tutto risulti predisposto con quel perfetto ordine che contraddistingue in ogni campo le organizzazioni fasciste”

218 “I calciatori inglesi arrivano domani,” Corriere Della Sera, May 9, 1939, 4. “I calciatori attendono in disciplina e in silenzio alla loro preparazione, alternando il lavoro il suo campo tra i vuoti spalti dello stadio Berta e la riposante quiete nell’agreste Roveta che costituisce soprattutto la loro preparazione spirituale”
government in previous football matches is present in the strong nationalist rhetoric of an article on the day of the match, calling for the players to fight a glorious battle for the name of Italy, citing their sporting class and the faith of the thousands of fans, those present as well as those across the world as the formidable arms with which they will do battle. Thus the Italian sporting experience, from match training to match planning and organization, is not only controlled by Fascist officials but is also utilized to represent the ideals of Fascist government. Thus as the period 1935-1939 consists of rushed development of British sporting policy aimed at understanding and neutralizing the propaganda efforts of especially the Continental dictatorships, the same period represents a consistent evolution in the Fascist program for sport and international prestige devised in the late 1920s.

The reports of the match in both national presses reveal a wonderfully played game of football, ending in a 2-2 draw, with both nations claiming the match as a success. Many English journalists described the game as fully living up to its billing as “la partita del secolo,” as a Daily Sketch headline read, “It was the match of the century.” English newspapers were also quick to note the “placid and sporting nature of the encounter” as well as the “commendably impartial crowd,” very different sentiments from the match reports after the “Battle of Highbury” in November 1934. The English press also, somewhat characteristic of their writing, found no doubt that the English

“dominated the game” and were superior to the Italians, while also noting that “the Italians then played with great assurance, and seemed to be filled with the same spirit of solidity which had characterized England’s play.” British writing about football consistently contains an air of arrogance, while also attaching importance to the sporting nature of the match and appearing fair to the opponents, usually pointing out examples of good play by the opposition. As reported in the Italian press, the general consensus of the English press considers the match a clear victory for English football, believing that their side was dominant in all aspects of the game, while questioning the legitimacy of Italy’s second goal. In the Italian reporting, the English also respected the way in which the game was played, noting the Italians did not fall completely back in defense, which made the game more enjoyable to watch and likely helped the English team score another goal and achieve the final result. The Italian press also notes that the match was a meeting of the two greatest footballing nations and was a great chapter in the history of football, as well as noting that in the battle of two styles, the Italians performed well and were able to achieve a draw against the originators of the game. Reprinting

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222 ibid.
224 Crolley and Hand, Football and European Identity, 18-22.
226 ibid. “Altri corrispondenti riconoscono invece che la partita e’ stata giocata con cavalleresco spirito sportive da una parte e dall’altra ed e’ stato un bel confronto di tecnica calcistica. In particolare si rileva che se nell’ultima parte dell’incontro gli Italiani non si fossero orientati verso una tattica difensiva, probabilmente i giocatori inglesi non sarebbero riusciti a pareggiare.”
227 “Echi della ‘partita del secolo,’” L’Ambrosiano, May 14, 1939, 5. “di fronte le due più grandi squadre calcistiche mondiali”; “Molto e’ stato gio detto e molto rimarre’ ancora da dire, poiche’ sabato si e’ scritto un capitolo fondamentale nella storia del calcio”;
correspondence from all over Europe, Italian papers illuminated praise for the match, as
the French journalist Luciano Gamblin, of L’Auto, noted the particular skills of each
nation which combined to reveal the best characteristics of international football, as the
English, superior in technique and tactics, were able to mold the game to their liking,
while the Italians played with tremendous energy, teamwork, and speed.228 Thus the
Italian press found the match to be a successful show of Italian skill, and the result
maintained Italy’s title as world champions, while the English team was satisfied to play
a match in a friendly sporting environment while not damaging their political or sporting
prestige. The British officials of both the Football Association and Foreign Office were
pleased with the result of the match against Italy, the most important of the tour of
Southern and Eastern Europe, and many believed the nature and result of the match
helped to mend Anglo-Italian relations.229 The British ambassador to Italy, Lorraine,
interpreted the match as a “valuable contribution to friendship between the two nations,”
and a way to achieve “an interesting insight into the attitude of the Italian masses to
Anglo-Italian relations,” as he witnessed the enthusiasm of the Italian crowd at the
match.230 Although the match had little real effect on retaining a diplomatic connection to
Italy, who had announced the Italo-German Pact and would conclude the Pact of Steel by

“le’estro e la genialita’ degli azzurri hanno potuto oppersi validamente alla potenza dei
calciatori britannici”
228 “Il giuoco degli ‘azzurri’ nei commenti internazionali,” L’Ambrosiano, May 17, 1939
5. “superiore in tecnica e in tattiva la squadra inglese condusse il giuoco a suo piacere
davanti agli ‘azzurri’ e incontrando una difesa accanita, vivace, mobile e operante con
precisione, l’attacco britannico mise in evidenza tutti i pregi piu’ raffinati del giuoco del
calcio.”, “Con una energia fantastica, sprezzando le fatiche di un primo tempo che li
aveva sminuti, gli ‘azzurri’ giocarono piu’ veloci, sempre piu’ veloci e sbalottarono
senza pietà la bella armonia del giuoco britannico che da allora divenne meno sicuro e
meno preciso.”
229 Beck, Scoring for Britain, 253.
May 22, Chamberlain’s government viewed the entire Continental trip a success, showing “that International matches can be played between teams of England and continental countries before big crowds in a vigorous yet friendly spirit,” and credited the players as “football ambassadors” who “performed a task of national importance” through their projection of positive British values abroad.231 These sentiments underline the incredible progress of the British government under Neville Chamberlain in the development of international football for political purposes and linking international football matches directly to governmental policies of appeasement. Although highly focused on the Nazi German threat to European security, English policymaker understood the important nature of sport to Fascist policies, and attempted to curry favor with Mussolini’s regime through its unique position as creator and disseminator of football.

CONCLUSION

The three football matches contested between Italy and England in the 1930s demonstrate the progression of the politicization of sport in interwar Europe, as Mussolini’s Fascist government developed sporting policies aimed at creating a virile, battle-ready nation at home while also contributing to Italy’s prominence abroad. British sporting policies, initiated in response to the developed and highly successful policies of Continental nations, sought to avoid antagonizing important strategic interests while also promoting proper British values in an increasingly hostile environment. Thus, Italian soldiers met British ambassadors as the two national football teams competed on football pitches in matches that represented much more than an encounter between two distinct approaches toward football. The matches represented the confrontation of two systems of

231 ibid, 257-9.
governance and their policies toward expansion, international prestige, and central governmental activity in pursuing those goals. Examining the national press reportage of both Italy and England lends to an understanding of the political nature of these matches, and the ways in which both nations utilized international sport, especially football, as a form of international political relations throughout the decade. Complicated by the widespread success of Italian teams in international competition and the omission of English national teams from those same competitions, these matches acted as distinctly important occasions, as three tests of international prestige and prominence, where two differing approaches to the shared national sport in fact represented a clash of the two disparate approaches to national governance. The importance of these fixtures permeated all levels of European society, as the everymen in the streets and government officials of national governments followed these footballing spectacles with great intensity, while a wider European audience was eager to equate a sporting victory with political success for their respective style of government. Thus, a close study of sport in the interwar period, especially in the 1930s, illuminates the complex politicized nature of the decade, when sport rose from a national pastime or leisure activity to take an important place in foreign policy aims and as a mode of diplomatic relations. A successful international sporting program was seen as vital to national interests, whether creating consent and prestige for a nascent political system, or in the process of wider European diplomacy aimed at securing peace.
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