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Nicola Sbetti

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Between National and Olympic Fidelity. The Italian IOC Member Alberto Bonacossa as a Case Study

Entre fidélité olympique et nationale. Le cas du membre du CIO Alberto Bonacossa

Nicola SBETTI

Dipartimento di Scienze per la Qualità della Vita
Università di Bologna
Corso d'Augusto, 237, 47921 Rimini RN
nicola.sbeti2@unibo.it

ABSTRACT: Count Alberto Bonacossa (Vigevano, August 24, 1883–Milan, January 30, 1953) was one of the most important and influential Italian sports leaders of the twentieth century. He held various positions at different times, spanning from Italy's liberal period to when it became a Republic, and including the fascist period. To mention only his international commitments, he was president of the International Motorcycling Federation, vice-president of the International Automobile Federation, member of the International Ice Hockey League and the International Skating Union, but above all, from 1925 onwards, he was a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), sitting on its executive committee from 1935. The aim of our article is therefore to provide an in-depth analysis of the different stages of Alberto Bonacossa's career, and in particular to understand the importance of his belonging to Italian nobility in the context of his involvement in international sports networks dominated by a culture that was at the same time cosmopolitan, transnational, and patriotic/nationalist. Our analyses are based in particular on the archives of the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI) and the IOC archives, and these should make it possible to highlight how the tensions between national and international are being recognized within international sports organizations, through the use of certain biographies.

KEYWORDS: Alberto Bonacossa, IOC members, Italy, International Olympic Committee, CONI

INTRODUCTION

The count Alberto Bonacossa (Vigevano 24.8.1883 – Milan 30.1.1953) was one of the most important Italian sport officials at international level. He was a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), president of the International Motorcycling Federation, vice-president of the International Association of Recognized Automobile Clubs and member of the International Ice Hockey Federation and of the International Skating Union. Not only was he a sports enthusiast and expert, but he demonstrated a great capability for political adaptation. In fact, he was one of the few sporting officials already active during the Liberal era to continue his activity during

Fascism and resume it after the end of the Second World War, under the Republic.

However, aside from a biography written by his son (Bonacossa 1956), there is no systematic historical work about him. With the exceptions of Giulio Onesti, (De Juliis, 2001; Mazzarini, 2010; Frasca, 2012; A.A.VV. 2018), Bruno Zauli (Colasante 2015), Brunetta d'Usseaux (De Luna, 2006), Giorgio Vaccaro (Pennacchia, 2008; Sbeti 2019), the historical and non-hagiographical works dedicated to Italian sport officials are very few. On the contrary, this research following the pioneering work of Guttman (1984), is expanding rapidly. For example, we can refer to the recent collective works edited by Bayle (2014), by Bayle and Clastres (2018), by Quin and Vonnard

(Quin, Vonnard, Jaccoud, 2019) or the congress organized by the *Réseau d'études des relations internationales sportives* (in 2016 and 2017 in Barcelona)¹. In this renaissance of studies on sports officials, for Italy we should also cite the work of Veruska Verratti (2008) on the circulation of elites in the equestrian world and that of Tito Forcellese (forthcoming) on the diplomatic networks of Italian aristocrats in sports institutions.

Bonacossa was part of the second generation of IOC members, who had met the founder Pierre de Coubertin but also being protagonists of the internationalization of sport between the two wars (Keys 2006) and in the years immediately after the Second World War.

The aim of this research is to study Alberto Bonacossa's biography to better understand the tension between national patriotism and the cosmopolitan and Olympic world, which shaped the life of international sport organizations. At the same time, his biography will be used as a paradigm to show how the quest for an apolitical approach coming from the top levels of international sport, could be used politically to defend national interests. Furthermore, we will also highlight the importance of continuity, personal relations, and knowledge of languages in order to be effective in the field of sport diplomacy.

In particular we will examine his early career and co-option into the IOC, his attitude toward the request of the fascist government to withdraw the 1940 Rome Olympic bid, his ability in maintaining a leadership role in Italian sport without appearing to compromise with the fascist regime, his role in facilitating Italy's re-entry into the international sport arena and his idea of sport diplomacy. In the absence of a personal archive, the main sources used for this research are the IOC and the Italian

Olympic Committee (CONI) archives, and the press.

HIS EARLY CAREER AND CO-OPTION ONTO THE IOC

Born into a noble Lombard family at the end of the nineteenth century, Alberto Bonacossa soon discovered an all-round passion for sport. In Genoa, where he studied, he became an active member of the Gymnastic Club Cristoforo Colombo. In Turin, where he attended university, he developed a passion for climbing, ice skating and all the winter disciplines (skiing, bobsleigh, ice hockey), but his final evolution into a sportsman took place abroad during his stay at the Institut Polytechnique de Zurich and then at the Technische Hochschule in Karlsruhe. In Switzerland he learned to play football, to row, to play tennis, to drive a motorcycle and he took advantage of the lake to improve his swimming. In Germany, thanks to a Japanese friend, he also learned the secrets of judo (Bonacossa 1956).

He also improved his German, a language that would be useful during his long sports career but also when serving in the Army. The years in uniform did not interrupt his sporting growth because he had the opportunity to develop his skills in more traditional disciplines, such as fencing, shooting and horseback riding. However, being a military engineering officer, he engaged himself in the diffusion of football and athleticism among soldiers. Furthermore, his contribution in the First World War, for which he was awarded a silver medal for military valor, gave him the status of a patriot (Ibid. See also Veschi, 1969).

From a sporting point of view, it was mainly in ice-skating where he obtained his best results.² However, it was in tennis that, after having already played for the national colors

1 Concerning those conference, one can visit the website of the network : www.reris.net

2 He won several international competitions and he was 10 times national individual champion and three times, with his wife Marisa, in doubles.

on several occasions, he participated in the Olympic Games in Antwerp. In 1920, he was already 36 years old and his sports management career at the national level had already started. At the time, he was president of the Italian Moto-Club and was on the board of other national federations. Somehow, his presence at the 1920 Olympics was more important for his future IOC career than the sporting results. In fact it was on this occasion that he met Pierre de Coubertin, Henri de Baillet-Latour and other members of the Olympic family (Ibid.) and that he started to adopt the ideal of “sporting knighthood” (Hoberman 1995; Carpentier 2004, Clastres, 2005).

If 1922 and the fascist rise to power represented a cleavage for several Italian sport officials linked to the liberal *milieu* and not prepared to compromise with fascism, such as Carlo Montù (Bonini 2006; Bonini-Lombardo 2015), for Count Bonacossa it became an opportunity. Despite his aristocratic background and his loyalty, which was first toward the monarchy, he was flexible enough to cooperate with the new leaders.

One key moment for his career was his cooption onto the IOC at the 1925 session in Prague. Fundamental on this occasion was the support of the Italian member, the liberal Carlo Montù, marginalized in Italy but still influential in Lausanne. Montù wanted to avoid being designated a member of the Fascist Party (PNF) (Forcellese 2013). Following the co-option of Italian sport to the fascist project in the mid-twenties (Fabrizio, 1976; Martin, 2006; Dogliani, 2009; Giuntini-Canella 2009; Landoni, 2016; Serapiglia 2016.), the regime wanted to impose loyal Italian members onto the IOC, but this was against the Olympic rules. The co-option of an aristocrat sportsman not hostile to fascism seemed the best choice for everyone. Bonacossa was already very experienced in international sport and his profile as landowner and businessman were perfect for the IOC’s requirements. Furthermore, his

knowledge of languages made him the ideal candidate. At the same time, his fidelity toward fascism went well beyond a simple interest. Despite his refusal to assume a political role, he and his wife were close to the Mussolini family – in particular Vittorio and Donna Rachele – and Galeazzo Ciano’s family (ACS, SPD, CO 550967, Alberto Bonacossa). Another proof of his proximity to the regime is given by the words he used in 1933 to describe to the IOC president, the new CONI president who was concurrently the national secretary of the PNF. Bonacossa described Achille Starace as “a fellow comrade in arms and a close friend” (ACIO, D-RM01-ITALI/004 E.C. CNO ITA, Corr. 1928-1978).

In 1928, Montù strongly opposed the self-candidacy of Lando Ferretti, who was CONI president and closely linked to the PNF. Ferretti tried to convince the marquis Giorgio Guglielmi, who aimed to become president of the Italian Senate, to resign in order to take his place. However, this operation, which restricted IOC autonomy, was blocked by Montù, who ended Ferretti’s bid by describing him to the new IOC President, Baillet-Latour, as a “politician” (Forcellese 2013: 93). It was only thanks to the mediation of Bonacossa, who was able to create a positive dialogue between Rome and Lausanne that the impasse and the tensions between the fascist CONI and the IOC were overcome by the end of the 1920s. At the beginning of the 1930s Italy was perfectly integrated in the international sporting system and well accepted in the IOC (Ibid., 91-100). After the success of the “Mussolini Boys” at the 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Games, in 1933 the King of Italy obtained a prize from the IOC. In 1934 the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro³ was recompensed with the Olympic Cup and the IOC President Baillet-Latour accompanied by Bonacossa participated in the international university games in Turin and was received by Benito Mussolini (Forcellese, 2013 : 107-108, 137).

3 National Recreational Club, formed in 1925.

In fact, to define the former athlete Bonacossa as a sport official or a sport organizer is too restrictive. As a passionate sportsperson, he was also a sports judge, collector, businessman, writer and editor of the two most important sporting newspapers: *La Gazzetta dello Sport* and *Il Littoriale*.

NATIONAL OR OLYMPIC FIDELITY? THE CASE OF THE 1940 OLYMPIC BID

In 1935, the international perception of fascist Italy changed following the invasion of Ethiopia. As a reaction to sanctions imposed by the League of Nations, Italy decide to cancel some international competitions (such as participation in the 1936 Tour de France). Again it was Bonacossa who, thanks to his knowledge of the Olympic codes, immediately went to reassure Baillet Latour and the IOC affirming that it was not an official boycott (ACIO, Mbr., Bonac. and Corr. Voir: Impiglia, Lang, 1997, 8-39; Arnaud, 1998, 136-7 ; Teja, 1998, 163 ; Russi, 2009: 99-118). But on this occasion, in order to avoid any type of sporting sanctions Bonacossa defended the fascist regime. In contrast, some months before he had opposed the Duce's will.

The fascist party wanted to transform Rome into an imperial capital and the organization of the Olympic Games seemed to be useful for this project. In 1934 the bid for the 1940 Games was advanced with the full support of Mussolini and Starace. However, the PNF was also interested in hosting the Universal Exposition of 1941-1942. Success in this project in June 1936, one month before of the final assignation of the Games, was a key purpose of the Olympic project (Forcellese, 2013: 102-108, 142-143). However, the lobbying pressure of Japan, which desired to host the Games in Tokyo to celebrate the 2,600 years of the Imperial family (Polley, 1992; Holt, 1998; Beck, 1999), had already changed the situation. On the eve of the 1935 IOC session in Oslo, a Japanese delegation formed by the

ambassador in Italy Sugimura and the Count Soyeshima, met Mussolini in order to request support for the 1940 Tokyo bid, in exchange for Japanese support for Rome's bid for 1944. Mussolini, who sought to reinforce good relations with Japan, especially considering the projected invasion of Ethiopia, accepted. However, the decision of the Japanese delegation to play the card of the agreement with Mussolini in public, jeopardized everything. Such political agreement was against IOC principles. That is why Baillet-Latour was offended, and decided that the IOC assembly should only vote for the 1940 and not for the 1944 Games. Considering this new situation, Bonacossa, the only Italian member at the Oslo session, rescinding Mussolini's promise to Japan and without any consultation with CONI, decided autonomously not to not withdraw the Rome bid. A furious Sugimura immediately went to the Italian embassy in Oslo to ask Mussolini to overrule Bonacossa and to respect the agreement. Urgently contacted by the Italian government and not without a certain degree of reluctance, Bonacossa was forced to follow such high-ranked orders. However, with great diplomatic ability he managed to preserve the integrity of Italian sport rather than acknowledge the political interference; he declared that he could not push on with the bid because of the lack of new information from CONI. It was a cunning move because the admission of this political pressure would have delegitimized the IOC, CONI and Bonacossa himself. He was recompensed for this demonstration of autonomy (at least from the formal point of view) by being chosen as a member of the IOC executive committee; a role that guaranteed him even more independence from national sport (Forcellese, 2013 : 114-136). The decision on the 1940 bid was then postponed to the 1936 session in Berlin, when Tokyo won unopposed (Collins 2009). In 1937, Bonacossa supported Rome's losing bid for the 1944 Games against London, but he managed to obtain the Winter Games for Cortina.

At that moment, Bonacossa had already reinforced his international image as a loyal man, respectful of Olympic values and capable, if needed, to stand against political influence, although in the end, he always settled for following the government preference. Furthermore, in 1939 when Italy fully supported the project of creating a new international sporting order (Carpentier 2004, Clastres, 2012 ; Polycarpe, 2012 ; Fabrizio, 2018), Bonacossa seems to have kept his distance. For example the May 9, 1941, in a letter to Baillet-Latour he wrote: “personally I think that for the election of new members we should await the end of the war” (ACIO, Mbr., Bonac., Corr.) ; a position which was against the Axis sporting strategy. This hypothesis seems to be also confirmed by a letter written the 19 November 1946 by CONI President Giulio Onesti, to IOC President Edström in which he affirmed that the Fascist party “had retired Bonacossa’s diplomatic passport already during the first year of war” (ACSR, Pcm 1955-1958, fasc. 3-2-5, n. 10024/52.).

THE MAN OF CONTINUITY

Bonacossa’s role after the Second World War in opposing the ostracism of Italian sport at international level was also significant (Sbetti 2015). Bonacossa had been loyal to the fascist regime and during his first 20 years in the IOC he always prioritized the sporting interest of his nation over that of the IOC. However, this nationalist approach always respected the Olympic formalities, values, ideology, language and traditions (Chappelet, 1991 ; Clastres 2005 ; Clastres, 2012 ; Polycarpe, 2012). Furthermore, his attitude on the occasion of the 1940 bid, gained him increased the respect from his peers. This legitimacy at the international level was also recognized in Italy. Hence, after the fall of Mussolini on July 25, 1943 and the rise to power of Pietro Badoglio and the King, on August 8, Bonacossa was chosen as CONI Commissioner; a role he kept only until September 8, 1943, because after the

armistice and the German occupation of the Center-North of the Peninsula and the Civil War, he preferred to retire from public life (Bonini 2006).

His absence from the world of sport was, however, short lived. Giulio Onesti, the new CONI commissioner and the president, who from 1944 until 1978 led Italian sport, was a *parvenu*, who knew little about the world of sport and had no foreign languages (De Juliis, 2001 ; Mazzarini, 2010 ; Frasca, 2012 ; AA.VV. 2018). Given a certain hostility against Italy in the international sporting arena, Onesti needed a guide. Also because, while at the lower level it was possible to find a high level of continuity (Archambault, 2012 ; Giuntini, 2017), in 1945 almost all presidents of national sporting federations active in the fascist period had lost their position. This allowed CONI to present itself in the international arena as a new institution which had totally retracted from its fascist past, but at the same time the absence of experience and knowledge in the new officials influenced their effectiveness (Sbetti 2016). At the international level, the Italian IOC members (Bonacossa, Thaon de Revel and Vaccaro) represented the most important element of continuity because they had been co-opted by the IOC and not elected (or chosen) by national institutions. All three had, at different levels, compromised with fascism. However, only Bonacossa, thanks to his international legitimacy was immediately considered useful by Onesti. Giorgio Vaccaro, initially involved in the post-fascist trials and seen as undesirable by CONI, was expelled from the IOC in 1950, while Paolo Thaon de Revel, who was a minister under the Mussolini governments, resumed his activity as an IOC member only in 1949 (Ibid.).

Being a member of the executive commission and highly esteemed by his IOC colleagues, Bonacossa became Onesti’s main choice of someone able to plan Italy’s overseas sport politics. As Onesti wrote to the Swedish IOC President Sigfrid Edström: “I beg you ... to consider Count Bonacossa as the only

spokesperson of the will of the Italian Olympic Committee" (ACIO, D. Rmoi., Itali. 006, SD5: Corr. 1943-1947).

In any case, his task was not easy. Despite the fact that after the signature of the armistice of September 8, 1943 Italy joined forces with the Allies, the treaty still considered Italy a defeated enemy country. This *ethos* was also reflected in sports with a silent quarantine toward Italy. In fact, in the IOC and in the international sporting federations (ISFs) many members wished to exclude the sporting institutions and the athletes of the countries which had lost the war. If, in some ISFs this revanchist idea was predominant, the IOC and the majority of the others, adopted a more juridical approach. For example at the Olympic Games: "*Il est admis que seuls seront invités les pays possédant un [Comité Olympique] à l'exclusion des autres*" (ACIO, Session at Lausanne September 3-6, 1946). So countries whose military had occupied others could not participate.

Bilateral relations were also complicated. In 1945, with the sole exception of Switzerland, no other country wanted to reopen sporting relations with Italy (Sbeti 2015). It was only with the signing of the peace treaty that it was possible to resume sports relations with countries which had won the war. So Bonacossa and Onesti developed a strategy to reduce the impact of this ostracism. After a first period of "vigilant passivity", instead of being demanding and publicly victimizing themselves, they tried to fight this hostility by working in the background, in order to restart sporting relations with everyone as soon as possible (Ibid.).

In the period of "vigilant passivity", Bonacossa could not participate in the first meeting of the IOC executive committee, which was held in August 1945 in London and included the British member Aberdare, the American, Brundage, and the Swedish, Edström. Significantly, all three members were from countries that had won the war or had remained neutral. In the minutes, in which there are no references to the German member von Halt, who at that time was imprisoned

in a Soviet camp but was believed dead, Bonacossa and the French member Polignac, who was on trial for collaboration during the Vichy regime, were listed as "excused" (ACIO, Commission exécutive de Londres aout 21-24, 1945). As Edström wrote on 15 May 1945 to Brundage: "Bonacossa is tied up in Italy" (ACIO, Brund. Arch., Film 25, 0004, Edström). Although possibly his absence was caused by health or transport issues, it is more likely that the Allied governments had denied him a visa, that someone had vetoed his participation or that Edström had secured his absence by a guarantee that the Italian Olympic Committee would not be excluded from the IOC.

This last hypothesis cannot be proved, however it becomes credible if we consider the case of the International Motorcycle Federation (FIM), a month later. In the middle of June 1946, at the first congress after the war, despite the request to exclude Italy by the English member Ball, Bonacossa, renounced his presidential role, in exchange for Italy retaining its membership (ACONI, Consiglio Nazionale juin 19-20, 1946 ; et *Gazzetta dello Sport* June 13, 1946 : July 1 and 2, 1946, 3).

Some months earlier, at a CONI meeting, Bonacossa had also asked for better coordination among the Italian sporting federations in their efforts to restart their international contacts. So on July 28, 1946, CONI asked him to work as a coordinator in order to "cancel all the political and military sanctions which still touched the free sporting movement, by insisting on the principle that sport is apolitical" (ACONI, Giunta July 28, 1946).

In September 1946, at the Lausanne session, the IOC did not exclude Italy. The first reason was the fact that Italy maintained its sovereignty, in contrast to Germany and Japan, which had allowed a quick reconstruction of CONI and the national sport federations. The second was the support of Edström. However, it should be highlighted that the IOC president, by affirming that sport was apolitical, was not only adopting a policy in order to facilitate the reentering of the former Axis countries, but

also to defend himself, because at the beginning of the war he had adopted an ambiguous attitude toward Nazi Germany (Yttergren, 2007; Clastres, 2012). According to the Swede, being part of the Olympic family should be something stronger than any political fidelity. At the same time, the work of Bonacossa should not be underestimated; he was the only Italian present in Lausanne. After having strategically offered the IOC president his resignation, which was immediately rejected (*Corriere dello sport*, May 3rd, 1949 et *La Gazzetta dello sport*, November 21st, 1950) thanks to his diplomatic ability and his friendship network, he was able to preserve the Italian *status quo* in the IOC, his position on the executive committee and avoid any kind of sanction (ACIO, Session de Lausanne Septembre 3rd-6th, 1946). His role was also recognized by the CONI President, Giulio Onesti, who affirmed that “the results obtained by Bonacossa were something more than a simple episode” (*L’Avanti*, September 18, 1946) and gave Bonacossa the accolade that, at sporting level, “the position of Italy was completely separated from that of Germany and Japan” (ACS, PCM 1955-58, Fasc. 3-2-5, n° 10024).

A KEY FIGURE BETWEEN ITALY AND THE IOC

From a symbolic point of view, with the Lausanne IOC session, the worst part of Italy’s sporting quarantine was over. After that in almost all the ISFs the position of Italy was normalized with four exceptions⁴ which maintained the exclusion for all of 1946 and much of 1947 (Sbetti 2015). In order to solve this situation, CONI again designated the IOC member (ACONI, Giunta November, 20-21 1946), who could now take advantage of a more legitimate situation. During 1947 all the issues were solved, thanks also to the help of Edström who, advised by Bonacossa, personally defended the right of Italy to participate in international sport by directly writing to the ISU, FINA and

FIG presidents (but not tennis, because tennis was not an Olympic sport) (ACONI, Giunta 5 March 1947; ACIO, FI, Patin., ISU).

Still in April 1947, Bonacossa was the organizer of the FIM congress in San Remo, the first international sporting congress in Italy after the war. For that reason it was financed by an extraordinary contribution of 200,000 liras by CONI (ACONI, Giunta janvier 16-17, 1947). On that occasion Bonacossa was elected honorary president (*La Gazzetta dello Sport*, April 21, 1947: 1).

Bonacossa’s presence on the IOC executive committee was also important to reinforce Italy’s position in the Olympic movement. For example, when dealing with the request from the Free Territory of Trieste (FTT) for independent status, the IOC decided to consider it an Italian internal issue and asked Alberto Bonacossa to reply. Therefore, contrary to what was happening in the diplomatic arena, where the destiny of Trieste was dependent on the decision of the USA, the UK and the Soviet Union, rather than Italy or Yugoslavia, in the Olympic arena, thanks to Bonacossa (ACIO, PT, Edstr., Corr. 1946 et CIO, D. RM01, Tries/001), Italy was in a better position. Neither did Yugoslavia have any IOC representatives because its two members, Svetomir Đuki and Franjo Bu ar, had resigned in protest at the Tito government. It was thanks to this strength that CONI’s vision, already expressed in November 1946, also became the official IOC view. According to it, the IOC should not recognize the national Olympic committee (NOC) of a new geopolitical territory with a conflicted sovereignty such as the FTT and that “its citizens from a sporting point of view should be considered Italian or Yugoslavian according their free choice” (ACONI, Giunta November 20-21, 1946). Thanks to Bonacossa, this decision was first “approved and accepted unanimously without any discussion” by the executive committee

4 Ice skating, swimming, gymnastics and tennis.

(ACIO, Session de Stockholm, July 18-21, 1947) and then by the IOC assembly (Sbetti 2017).

As he admitted to the Italian press, Bonacossa's action was far from being neutral: "I've spoken about the Trieste case separated from my Italian nationality and to address the problem only as an IOC member. This made the IOC members more comfortable and helped us to reach our goal" (*La Gazzetta dello Sport*, June 26, 1947 : 1). So, by speaking an apolitical language and by respecting the neutrality required by the IOC at least formally, all these political decisions had helped the Italian victory. Furthermore, Bonacossa took also advantage of the anti-communist bias of the majority of IOC members (Clastres, 2008; Polycarpe, 2012).

However, his main success was the 1948 appointment of Rome as host city of the 1949 IOC sessions. A major war had ended only three years before – a war in which despite its change of alliance Italy was still considered an enemy. The fact that in the 1948 London IOC session, Rome won against Copenhagen by one vote (ACIO, Session, London July, 27-29 and August 13, 1948), it was a sport diplomacy masterpiece. Fundamental for the victory was the support of Latin solidarity. According to Bonacossa "the Latin countries, Europeans and South Americans, had together voted in favor of the Rome bid and it is particularly important that the choice of Rome has also been supported by France and Belgium" (*La Gazzetta dello Sport*, aout 19, 1948 : 1).

This victory not only allowed Italy to organize the IOC session – a privilege obtained only once before – but also confer a "home advantage" because Cortina was one of the cities bidding for the 1956 Winter Games. Cortina, the undisputed winner of the 1944 Winter Games, was a small vacation town, specializing in winter sport and beloved by Bonacossa who often spent his holidays there with his wife Marisa (Giuntini 2006). In 1947 Cortina had already proposed a bid for the 1952 Games and lost by 18 votes to 9 against Oslo plus 1 vote for Lake Placid (ACIO, Session de Stockholm July 18-21,

1947). As Bonacossa said, it was a signal that "Italy was regaining the support of the international world" (ACONI, Giunta July 5, 1947), and especially that it had "all the support of the countries linked to the Alpine zone" (*La Gazzetta dello Sport*, June 26, 1947 : 1).

From a diplomatic point of view, the Roman congress was a triumph. Taking advantage of the victory of the Melbourne bid and the fact that Australia could not organize the Winter Games, Cortina become the 1956 winter Olympic city thanks to 31 favorable votes against 7 for Montreal, 2 for Aspen and 1 for Lake Placid (ACIO, Session de Rome avril 24-29, 1949). Although different factors were important, Bonacossa was unanimously indicated as the main architect of a victory, which went far beyond the sporting sphere. Indeed a country which only five years before was still invaded, separated and destroyed by a civil war, which only two years before had suffered a punitive peace treaty and which was not yet part of the United Nations, was now chosen by a large majority to organize the Olympic Games, even though only the winter Games.

SPORTING DIPLOMACY ACCORDING TO BONACOSSA

As already highlighted, Bonacossa was fully aware that the IOC wished that "in sport there is no place for politics or at least that no political question should be examined" (ACONI, Giunta September 30-October 1, 1946) and that the answers: "shouldn't be [...] influenced by politics but based only on sport" (ACIO, Mbr., Vacca., Corr.). For the IOC this formal apolitical language should also be applied to the minutes. Furthermore, when it was necessary to deal with a complex political situation, its leaders preferred to meet informally to find an agreement, which could have been presented as "apolitical" in order to preserve a certain degree of autonomy. For example, in a letter of February 1946, the Englishman Lord Burghley wrote to the IOC Vice-President Avery Brundage: "I expect we will get through alright, but it did strike me that it would be

of considerable help should you and your colleagues happen to pass through England on the way, and we could have an informal and quite unofficial chat on the more thorny questions" (ACIO, Brund. Arch., Film 32, 0019, Exeter-Burghley).

Bonacossa had not only had been able to gain the support of his colleagues but he had also demonstrated his ability to play with this ambivalence. The apolitical principle was used by Italian sporting diplomacy to oppose ostracism and aim for an early resumption of Italian sport in the international arena. At the same time, he was well aware of the sport's political role. Significantly, on the pages of the *Olympic Bulletin* he wrote: "When we talk about human communities, we often use terms such as: 'geopolitical awareness', 'geo-economic' or 'geo-strategic awareness'. I wouldn't want to create another neologism, but I believe that, from now on, we can also talk about a 'geo-sports consciousness'" (Bonacossa, 1951).

After the full international re-legitimation of Italian sport, certified by the participation at the 1948 Olympic Games, the 1949 Rome Session and the victory of Cortina's 1956 bid, Bonacossa continued to see his task to: "be present when it is necessary in order to defend the Italian colors" (*La Gazzetta dello sport*, July 25, 1949, 8).

The "quarantine" was over and according to Bonacossa it was time to recover the lost ground. Italian sport officials could now abandon their low profile and start to aim for leading roles in the ISF. This would help them to attain a more powerful position in drafting statutes and regulations and in the composition distribution of juries in order to offer better opportunities for Italian athletes (*La Gazzetta dello sport*, February 19, 1949, 1 and 3). At the same time, he was also critical of the tactics sometimes adopted by his Italian colleagues. Too often, they adopted a bad strategy because: "instead of speaking of all the colleagues" they "rely too much upon the president of their International Sporting Federation, because they consider him more

powerful than he is, without considering that he has to follow the majority" (Ibid). But even more he found unacceptable the fact that after one political defeat the Italian representative once having returned home told the press that he had suffer some a conspiracy without taking into account the fact that such announcements were often repeated abroad and could undermine the Italian position in the next congress. According to Bonacossa the best way was to "work for the main goal, without attacking the problem head-on but rather circling it" (*Corriere dello sport*, May 3, 1949: 1).

He argued that a good official should have been an active sportsman, have a knowledge "of the discipline he [represented]", and be able to speak "at least one of the two languages of international sport" (*La Gazzetta dello sport*, février 19, 1949, 1 and 3). This because: "not being able to understand a language spoken [...] put the representative in a weaker position compared with those who can understand", it also prevented a face to face conversation and required a translator who often "explained the translation in a partial or in an affected way" (Ibid.). One other important element for the success of sporting diplomacy is respecting the etiquette. According to Bonacossa: "To go abroad [...] you must be familiar with the precious work of Monsignor Della Casa" (le *Galateo* (Ibid)).

So, it is unsurprising that, despite his age, Bonacossa decided to participate to the first Pan-American Games, held in Buenos Aires from February 25 until March 8, 1951. He went not only to represent the IOC in a new regional competition, but especially to reinforce his good relations with the Latino-American officials, especially the Argentinian, to promote the 1956 Winter Olympic Games, but also in order to start a South American strategy toward the 1960 Rome Olympic bid (*Bullettin du CIO*, n° 27, June 1951).

Hence, Bonacossa was very aware of his role as sporting diplomat, and although the defense of Olympic values came second compared to the interest of Italian sport, nationalism did

not influence his cosmopolitanism, his love of sport and his relations with his colleagues.

CONCLUSION

Despite his fundamental role in the re-legitimation of Italian sport, his death, on January 30, 1953, prevented him seeing the 1956 Cortina and the 1960 Rome Olympic Games. However, to acknowledge his role, when laying of a commemorative plaque in his honor at the Cortina stadium in 1956, the Italian IOC member Paolo Thaon de Revel said:

He was an attentive interpreter of Italian sport needs in the international arena. At a particularly difficult moment, he was able to obtain the organization of the 1956 VII Winter Olympics in Cortina. His idea was that this should represent a first step in preparing the winning bid for the 1960 Olympics. This life-long ambition was fulfilled in Paris last year. [...] We have to recognize that thanks to the authority of his name, this is now a matter for posterity, and thanks to his long preparation work [...] it has been possible for Rome to obtain the organization of the XVIII Olympics in Rome for 1960 (Thaon di Revel, 1956).

Finally, Bonacossa was always respectful of the Olympic ideology by defending it in Italy and respecting it in international meetings. However, he generally prioritized the interests of Italian sport rather than those from the Italian government. However, he was always loyal to any Italian government: firstly liberal, then fascist and finally Republican. Being an IOC member allowed him to distance himself from national sport politics and to place himself above it. At the same time, his position obliged him to be the first defender of Italian sport in international arenas. In a similar way to his colleagues, he worked not only to spread the Olympic ideal in his country but also acted as the Italian representative on the IOC, keeping a double identity both national

and Olympic, that allowed him to be respected and more effective.

The case of Bonacossa shows us the need for more studies on the national careers of the members of international sporting bodies in order to better understand both IOC and ISF histories and the milieu of international sport officials. At the same time, it reminds us of the weight of international obligations in the national histories of sporting institutions.

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