

FOOTBALL IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY - POLITICAL AND MEDIA ASPECTS

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between football, politics and the media sheds light on the essence of this modern sport, expressing the strength of their mutual connection, which is manifested through the power of the state and the media. The rapid development of football is conditioned by the media of mass communication, which enabled it to acquire such a position that will increase its influence on social movements. Just as the political elite quickly realized the power of the mass communication media, so with the increasing popularity of football presented in the form of a media spectacle, this sport profiled itself as the “perfect political tool”. Considering the set goal of the paper to show the position of football in contemporary society with particular reference to the political and media aspect of the relationship between football and society, it can be concluded that the bond between the observed social constituents is very strong and unbreakable. Football as a global sport, on the one hand, represents a powerful source and platform for socio-political action, while, on the other hand, media coverage of probably the most popular sport in the world brings huge financial profit and influence. Therefore, it is completely clear that football is a very profitable and significant partner in the development of social relations.

Key words: football, politics, media, globalization, contemporary society

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INTRODUCTION

Observing the development of society and sport from a historical point of view, it can be concluded that people have been engaged in various forms of competition since the earliest days, which indicates the mutual conditioning of the process of the creation and development of society in relation to certain spheres of sociality, such as the affirmation of a sporting event. Football, with its game rules and basic goals without which there is no scoring or winning, satisfies the fun function at matches and causes positive emotions in people who play and follow it.

The football game placed in a certain social context, which is discussed by Richard Giulianotti (2008, 7), points to the fact that football acquires different specificities depending on the environment in which it develops. That cause-and-effect connection between society and football in all the forms in which it manifests itself, and especially in the inevitable interaction and establishment of value orientations, also indicates the reverse process - and football leaves its mark on social development.

The connection between football and politics, the interweaving of the media and football as a media spectacle, one of the most profitable media content, are areas that must be analyzed in a certain social context. Many aspects of a person's daily life are a direct consequence of the acceptance of some of the newly created values that were initiated by events related to the football spectacle (Milenković & Milenković, 2022, 10). In accordance with the statement that football is directly related to the development of society, the relationship between football and society from a media and political point of view should be pointed out.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Unlike sociology, which elucidates social relations and discovers the causes that influence the formation of different forms of society, the communicological definition of society indicates the way relations between people are formed, indicates the manifestation and change of those relations (Radojković & Miletić, 2008, 9). Seeing that society has been shaped under the influence of the development of the production process and progress in the field of communication practice from the initial development of forces of production to the industrial and information society, the concept of society can be observed as a multitude of relationships that form the sociality of people aiming to isolate their interests and daily needs. Along that way, through signs and symbols, the first thoughts took shape and the production process was improved. Together with the development of society came the concept of free time, and afterwards the need to practice sports activities.

The study of the development of contemporary society involves the analysis of a sociocentric and mediacentric approach to changes in the human community, starting from favoring the importance of the media as important social agents, emphasizing cultural theories that indicate the influence of work, family, religion and the educational system on the history of civilization (Radojković & Miletić, 2008, 11-13).

The society was not created solely due to the actions of one of its constituents, and not even through the involvement of the media. It is the product of the wholeness of the spiritual creations of man, the results of setting standards of values by which to rule, the result of adaptation in accordance with those norms that are codified and are valid in a certain territory (along with other components that determine the concept of society).

If the social changes formed under the influence of technological development are classified as pre-industrial, industrial and post-industrial society (Bell, 1976, 14), then a conclusion can be drawn that the industrial revolution was characteristic among other things of the expansion of mass communication media, of the emergence of media culture and the development of contemporary football. The media has grown into a serious industry that soon recognized the full potential of the football game, which as media content will ensure the interest of a mass and afterwards the global audience. The rapid development of football is conditioned by the media of mass communication, which enabled it to acquire such a position that will increase its influence on social movements. Just as the political elite quickly realized the power of the mass communication media, so with the increasing popularity of football presented in the form of a media spectacle, this sport profiled itself as the “perfect political tool” (Pannenberg, 2010, 30) which is used with the aim of coercion and revanchism towards political dissenters, but also “as an indicator of the superiority of a state/ nation in relation to others, with the aim of affirming political ideology and image” (Milenković & Milenković, 2022, 125).

In the context of sociability, as part of the social sphere in which the elements of popular culture intertwine, football affects the national, class, political, media representation of the formation of identity and becomes a cultural matrix on the basis of which feelings are expressed, forms of representation are formed and symbolic meanings are created that can influence political ideologies (Ramón et al., 2018). That is the reason why this, according to many, the most popular sport is attributed another feature, which is a social responsibility that is especially binding the teams and selections which have more influence, power and allies. If the centers of political power were tied to sports with fewer followers in the world, the effects of achieving political goals would be much smaller. Football, however, as the number one sport, is a training ground for socio-political differences, a space for competition between political rivals and a powerful tool for political propaganda. Observing football as a significant political phenomenon that tends to control and use (Krsmanović, 2021, 297), the state apparatus often used this sport for the purpose of mobilizing the masses for propaganda state programs or as a form of social control over the colonized population (Ramón et al., 2018).

The definition of “politicization” consists of two segments: “diversion of purpose” which indicates political factors who interfere in activities outside the institutionalized political sphere and “crossing the boundaries” whose meaning indicates the factors outside the specialized political sphere who change their way of acting by giving it a political dimension (Lagroye, 2003). Therefore, the politicization of football at its highest level manifests itself at the moment when football actors openly assume a

political role, thus giving their actions a political meaning. This is, for example, the action of fans who, instead of cheering their team, express their political views during the game. Something similar happens to football players who are politically engaged through the media, football officials who build a political career, club owners who rely on support by opting for a certain political option or engaging politicians themselves in the sphere of football management in order to gain cheap political points. At the same time, fan groups are the fastest and easiest way to impose themselves on politicians by expressing their power and views on important social issues that go beyond football (Ramón et al., 2018).

Whether football is talked about as of a “special way of thinking and expressing in the global age” (Foer, 2004) or whether it is seen only as a popular game that produces different experiences of fans in the stands or in front of their TV sets, football can hardly be imagined without a media presentation that will present the football match as a globalized media super spectacle (Klein, 2011). Football is specific for its developing in one cultural area, and then those specificities of football culture and local playing styles are transferred and spread globally. Such is the case, for example, with the Brazilian skill of dribbling, German offensive or Dutch total football, which affect the development of world football, techniques, tactics and forms of training (Klein, 2011).

The transition from analog to digital representation of the media-sports spectacle, increased international exchange in all spheres of society as a result of global processes, also influenced changes in the field of sports. Application of new technologies, faster and better communication, more efficient market influenced the expansion of sports, changed the concept of functioning of sports organizations and adaptation of local strategies to the global environment, so thus, sports events get the epithet of world events (Milenković & Milenković, 2022, 15).

METHODS

The study of football implies placing it in the context of the political and media framework, which gives modern football more significance compared to simplistic definitions that emphasize only its entertaining character. Observing football from different perspectives points to its multifaceted role in global society, which is inevitably connected with all the value elements of football, which is often referred to as the most popular sport on the planet. By using the historical, descriptive-explanatory method and the method of theoretical analysis, the paper was created with the aim of presenting the position of football in contemporary society with a particular reference to the political and media aspect of the relationship between football and society.

FOOTBALL AS A MEDIA SPECTACLE

The media, as one of the most significant phenomenon of contemporary society, are present in all areas of social life, building a whole complex of relationships with politics, economy, education, entertainment, sports. Football as a global sport

attracts the attention of audiences all over the world. Football matches have become a lucrative business created according to the wishes of the media audience, and the development of sports journalists' reporting from the emergence of football to nowadays represents a relationship of mutual influence. Along that way, sports journalism moved from, conditionally speaking, objective to "biased and emotionally colored, devoid of professional journalistic distance" (Milinkov & Strika, 2018). Stereotypes in the media spread quickly and easily, prejudices about 'us' and 'them' appear in public and political discourse, which can lead to additional tension and misunderstanding in society, so disagreements and different interests are most easily manifested in media debates instead of through dialogue on the football field. As more often social problems spill over into sports arenas, and the viewership and commerciality of football are recording increasingly better results, so football is becoming an growingly influential subject of social movements.

Media as "global football stadiums" (Vasilj, 2004, 19) are not only participants in the broadcast of football field events. Aside from influencing the income of football clubs obtained for TV broadcasting rights, (Manoli, 2022) the media, in cooperation with football as a social phenomenon, have become "those who set the dominant values in society, shape the structure and organization of sports, enable the development of specialized sports channels, they have a decisive effect on the behavior of the segmented audience" (Milenković & Milenković, 2022, 206) and are an important factor that influences the change in the timing of matches in order to adapt to the sports program (Blain & Boyle, 2005). The financial importance of the media on the well-being of football clubs could be seen during the Covid-19 pandemic, when, due to two months of not playing football matches, clubs were most financially affected by the lack of TV rights fees (Milenković & Milenković, 2021).

What is the role of the media in increasing the influence of football on social events, on the development of the football game and its connection with the development of society itself, can be seen from the fact that Manchester United F.C. 1998. was the first to launch its own TV channel with a specialized program. Other prestigious clubs followed: FC Barcelona and Real Madrid CF in 1999, A.S.Roma, Internazionale

F.C. and A.C. Milan in 2000, Chelsea F.C. two years later, and in 2004 Celtic F.C. and Glasgow Rangers F.C. By launching their channels, they begin to actively participate in shaping the opinions, attitudes and behavior of the global audience. Their example was followed by other European clubs, growing into creators of sports shows.

In an effort to reconcile the obligation to satisfy the interests of the public with the acquisition of profit, the media, together with their media and sports content, adhere to the laws of the entertainment industry. Considering the concept of mediatization, which indicates the relationship between sports and the media in line with the increase in viewership, football represents a media product that has grown from a common sports event into a global media spectacle. In the interweaving of entertainment with other media functions, in the creation of a media spectacle, the spectators in the stands also become the participants of the football event. The televised presentation of the matches allowed the audience on a global level to see all the beauties of the football game: color, drama, the supreme skill of the players,

the uncertainty of the result. What football attracts particular attention with is the massiveness and exceptional emotionality that binds fans to their clubs and their national selection. Media promotion of top athletes leads to an increased desire of fans to identify with the public and private life of football players (Messi, Beckham, Neymar, C. Ronaldo, Mbappé) (Klein, 2011) and according to the results achieved, football stars become the embodiment of superiority of society/nation.

Through the media the culture of the football game becomes a new communication model that should be followed in the postmodern world in which the content and meaning of the message are suppressed, in which the semblance of truth and reality is offered. By associating with the powerful entertainment industry, the football spectacle has been defined as a media presentation of a sporting event at a highly reproductive level which, taking on a distinctly entertaining character, becomes a part of mass culture intended for a global audience, regardless of the level of its cultural taste (Milenković & Milenković, 2022, 215). The phenomenon of the media-sports super spectacle is deprived of the basic media informative function and relies on the aesthetic and entertaining side of football, forgetting about the basic task of sport, which is the education of people in the field of physical education. In the age of the visual representation of the world, the global popularity and commerciality of football, which it achieves due to its connection both with traditional and new media, allows this sport to take an even better position in the interdependent relationship with society.

The culture of spectacle that promotes the display of a football match, rather than the sporting event itself, was made possible by the rapid development of new technologies that increased media possibilities, expanded the market and introduced many innovations. In recent years, the following have started to be used: Super Slow Motion (SSM) and High Speed Slow Motion (HSSM) camera systems, as well as drones to show the end of the match; the player-cams interactive service allowed viewers to follow only the movement of one football player in a match; VAR (Video Assistant Referees) technology in 2018 to reduce refereeing errors (Dugalić, 2018). At the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, semi-automated technology was used for the first time for offside, which was determined using 12 cameras and a chip in the ball (Bosna info sport, 2022). Besides, for the first time, artificial intelligence (AI Jazeera, 2022) was used to monitor all events and personalities on the field and in the stands. Fifteen thousand cameras with facial recognition technology were at the service of the safe playing of this football World Cup.

The technical-technological improvement that follows the modern requirements of the production and presentation of the sports super spectacle has enabled European football clubs to use the so-called multichannel platforms in which online media offers are used - video stream for mobile devices. In cooperation with cable and satellite providers, an offer of different forms and content of TV programs was created, such as direct broadcasts, interviews, archival recordings, video analyzes (Šurbatović, 2014). The sports theme is favored by interactivity, multimedia and the possibility of active participation of the recipients in real time. Direct relationship between clubs, players and fans has been made possible by social networks. The most prestigious clubs Real

Madrid CF, FC Barcelona and Manchester United F.C. were the first who opened their accounts by launching its multimedia platforms that offer numerous possibilities and advantages to internet users: communication with the club in different languages, purchase of tickets, connection to YouTube, web games, video materials, TV broadcasts that take place via Facebook and Twitter (FC Barcelona) (Milenković & Milenković, 2022, 222).

FC Barcelona alone has more than 50 million Facebook followers; (Reuters, 2014) football player Cristiano Ronaldo has the largest number of fans on social networks; The Premier League has the largest number of followers, and their members have social interaction with tweeters who can tweet live during the broadcast of the match (Dugalić, 2018). Additionally, viewers have the option of following live TV broadcasts of Premier League football matches on the Sky Sports PL channel. This advantage is followed by the simultaneous watching television as a traditional media and the use of social networks during the football match. This connection of “old” and “new” media is indicated by the fact that 61 percent of Twitter users, while watching a TV broadcast, simultaneously visit the network and post comments (Moy, 2014); 49 percent of users follow the comments during the match to get additional information and make the experience of the sports spectacle even more interesting. Visitors on Instagram share about 40 million photos during the day and write almost a thousand comments every second (Bianchi, 2013).

If this information is contextualized with research that indicates the increasing use of social media in daily information (Čolić, 2021), it is easy to conclude how important the online communication of football workers and players is to the behavior and opinion of the global audience and society as a whole. Although abuses have been noticed on the Internet, which led to Premier League teams organizing a boycott of social networks in 2021 to prevent further escalation of offensive comments, modern reporting cannot be imagined without digitalization of sports and media. Digital broadcasting systems enable high-quality sports content, and digital cameras monitor events on the field, record them, computer-process videos, enable slowing down or speeding up the action, zooming, connection of image and sound, and repetition of the most interesting segments.

Seen this way, football represents an important socio-political agent at the national and global level in postmodern society. Through the media, football affirmed its game and universal sports values, indicated that excellent results can be achieved with persistent work, that in this way society, culture, education, the political and economic position of the country can be promoted, because the position of the national team is on the ranking list of “football greats” is a matter of prestige and a reflection of political power.

THE POSITION OF FOOTBALL IN POLITICAL GAMES

If sport is seen as one of the best ways of collective catharsis, it can be said that the possibilities of using it for political purposes are numerous. Thus, through sports, the political superiority of certain nations can be seen, “because victory on the sports

field, through carefully selected newspaper portrayals is transformed into the victory of a particular ruling system” (Živanović et al., 2010, 304). The possibility of using sports to create political pressure, shaping a political image and provoking conflict often represent a kind of sports-political training ground (Živanović et al., 2010, 304). One of the best examples of the connection between sports and politics can be seen in the globally popular sport - football.

The rapid spread of football to the rest of the world, after its emergence in England, happened mainly thanks to business connections and trade routes. Politicians have been made interested in football because of its great popularity both attempting to control and discipline the population, and to present their political and national ideas. In recent times, the activity of organized fan groups in the football stadiums and everything related to them has a distinct political dimension. Political activism in stadiums around the world is evident in the efforts to set and achieve various political demands, such as participation in protests, campaigns, lobbying, etc (Milenković & Milenković, 2022, 127).

Belgian football is under pressure due to political conflicts between the Flemish and the Walloons. Despite the efforts to unite all the Belgians around the recent successes of the national football team, that enthusiasm is considered more of a passing trend in moments of advanced social and political problems in the form of the actions of the local clubs fans in the Belgian stadiums, which are the scene of the so-called of “Belgian-Belgian racism” (De Waele & Sterck, 2018).

Spanish politics can be reflected through the official state nationalism advocated by the Government in Madrid, basing its policy on the legacy of the centralist state project brought from France by the Bourbon dynasty in the 18th century, while peripheral nationalism is propagated by the old nations from the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia, whose goal is to defend their civil rights that the new central nationalism tried to abolish. This political situation is also reflected in the events at football stadiums, where various political symbols can be seen, from the extreme right and neo-Nazism to the extreme left and separatism (Viñas, 2018).

In Italy, the fascist regime first entered football with its policy with the aim of unifying the nation and nationalizing the masses, so that after the Second World War, the Catholic Church and the Communist Party would help a lot in turning football into a national sport. Political ‘players’ in post-war Italy saw football as an important element of political control and consensus building. Italian political structures are often involved in the management of the clubs themselves. In A.S. Roma there were frequent changes in the leadership positions of officials associated with the Christian Democracy Party, and there were also communists like Alvaro Marchini. Silvio Berlusconi was at the same time the Italian Prime Minister and the President of A.C. Milan, whose fans were the earliest base of his new party Forza Italia! the moment he entered politics (Archambault, 2018).

German football became politically interesting during the Weimar Republic, as well as with the subsequent coming to power of the National Socialists in 1933. Football workers were obedient to the new rulers, partly because of ideological closeness,

partly because of fear for the competitive licenses of their clubs if they were not sufficiently “patriotic” (Sonntag, 2018). After the Second World War and the division of Germany, football had a dominant influence on the development of both nations. It was used to promote government and social order. Both Germanys quickly seized the opportunity to emerge from international isolation through football, hoping to forget the sins of the past as soon as possible. West Germany returned to FIFA in 1950, while East Germany did so in 1952, and then both of them participated in the creation of UEFA in 1954. However, according to the words of Alan McDougall (2015), in those football processes, East Germany avoided direct confrontation with yesterday’s war opponents, so until the 80s of the 20th century, an inferiority complex was evident.

In order to deal with advanced hooliganism at football events, police control of football fans in Poland at the beginning of the 21st century was increasingly restrictive, even when prearranged fan fights were far from football events and ordinary people (Woźniak, 2018). New regulations which were passed in line with European legislation during the liberal-right-wing government of Prime Minister Donald Tusk, were rigorous in terms of surveillance, fan identification and a ban on any political activism at football events, even including banners (Antonowicz & Grodecki, 2016). Fans of foreign national teams at the 2012 European Championship held in Poland and Ukraine were excluded from such regulations, which led to even harsher criticism from supporters of radical elements in the country, especially among fans. This behavior of radical fans was not only perceived in the media as anti-government, but the fans were also linked to the activities of the opposition political party Law and Justice (Kossakowski et al., 2017).

Although sport in Bolshevik Russia was considered a convenient means of internal political action (Grant, 2014), football was not to the liking of the Bolshevik leaders, due to its elitist, British origins. However, the popularity of football prevailed, so the political elites of the USSR between the two wars were powerless. Considering the possibility of creating social communities that are chosen outside the state-controlled structures (fan groups), football could be imagined as a kind of resistance to the Stalinist regime. Even when football clubs were founded, it was known which state structure stood for each of them. CSKA (previously also called CDKA, CDSA) was a military club, FC Dynamo Moscow was backed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, FC Lokomotiv Moscow was under the patronage of the Ministry of Transportation, FC Spartak Moscow was founded by Promkoooperaciâ, a union of service sector workers (sailors, waiters, tailors and barbers), while FC Torpedo Moscow was under the patronage of the union of workers from the ZIS automobile factory (Gloriozova, 2018).

Football was used in Ghana under President Kwame Nkrumah as a means of propaganda and the spread of nationalist and pan-Africanist ideology. Asare (1982) opined that President Nkrumah supported sport/football as a reflection of personal political and social values. President Nkrumah also formed the Real Republicans Sporting Club, one of whose sections was a football club (Charway & Houlihan, 2020). However, instead of promoting his political and social ideals, the club caused a rift between the government and the Ashanti people (Pannenberg, 2010).

The political crisis during the 2010 presidential election in Ivory Coast led to clashes between supporters of then-incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo and opposition candidate Alassane Ouattara. The clashes led to Gbagbo's arrest and the installation of Ouattara as president. A 10-member Truth and Reconciliation Commission was subsequently formed, with the vice-chairman being the celebrated football player Didier Drogba. An opportunity to create a positive image of Ivory Coast in the world was the 2012 Africa Cup of Nations. President Ouattara watched the lost final against Zambia, so Gbagbo's supporters considered it a bad sign. On the other hand, some supporters of President Ouattara suspected that Drogba had deliberately missed a penalty kick in regulation time to deny Ouattara the chance to celebrate the continental championship title (Künzler, 2018).

The Algerian National Liberation Front, fighting for independence from France, spread national messages through football, which was a tool for mobilizing people against colonization. Stadiums became a place of political expression, and matches became an opportunity for Muslim teams to "defeat" their oppressor, which had a symbolic meaning and strengthened the Algerian identity and the cause they were fighting for (Amara & Bouandel, 2018).

Football is often used in Japan as a means of diplomacy and trying to bring people closer together, such as organizing a match with football players from war-torn Iraq that was played in Tokyo and broadcast to an audience in Baghdad. Japanese diplomacy was also active in the Middle East, inviting young football players from Palestine and Israel to participate in football camps and to compete against each other, thus tending to bring members of the two conflicting nations closer together (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2018).

Football came to colonized India with the English East India Company (Bandyopadhyay, 2018). This sport was used for propaganda purposes as an instrument of imperial moral persuasion (Mangan, 2003), and as a part of the educational system in Anglo-Indian schools as a process of developing moral values, team spirit, obedience to authority and proper physical development (Mangan, 2002). However, football quickly became a cultural tool for the struggle of the subordinates with the masters, as a confirmation of the physical strength and masculinity of the Indians in the clash with the colonizers in a national sense (Mitra, 2006).

The connection between politics and football in Argentina is also seen in the connection of people from local and national political structures with the management of football clubs and the relationship with fan groups. Candidates for club presidents are usually public officials, trade union leaders or people associated with political parties (Bourdieu, 1997). The position of a president of a football club is also connected with the support of football fans of that club, namely those who are characterized by violent actions. The former president of Argentina, Mauricio Macri, was the president of the Boca Juniors football club for 12 years (Alabarces et al., 2018).

In Uruguay as well, football and politics are connected through club managements that are often made up of politicians. The appointed party staff has the opportunity to become familiar with the management structure of an organization and to be exposed

to popularity due to football success, which is intensively followed in Uruguay. The two most popular Uruguayan clubs were affiliated with political parties, C.A. Peñarol with the Colorado party, and Nacional with the Blanco party (Bizzozero Revelez, 2018).

Ten years after the formation of the Yugoslav Football Association in 1919 in Zagreb, there was a (political) aspiration to move the Association to Belgrade, which was done with much political turmoil. Therefore, the Yugoslav national team at the World Championship in Montevideo in 1930, due to the boycott of Croatian players, was mostly made up of Serbian footballers (Milenković & Milenković, 2022, 138). After the Second World War, football was also the focus of the new authorities, so all the clubs that competed during the German occupation were disbanded. New clubs “imbued with the spirit of socialism and a multi-ethnic outlook” were formed (Đorđević, 1973, 134). In this regard, the competition of the new country had to be composed of teams representing all member republics. Even four years after the political disagreement with the Eastern Bloc, the football match between Yugoslavia and the USSR at the Olympic Games in Helsinki in 1952 was loaded with political tensions. After Yugoslavia won the match, the Soviet players left the field immediately after the end of the match without greeting, which met with condemnation by the spectators. The foreign press was full of interesting headlines, such as “Tito’s troops beat Stalin’s”. Yugoslav newspapers widely wrote about the great victory, while some Soviet newspapers did not even register this news (Mijatov, 2019). Increasing political turmoil in Yugoslavia during the 80s of the 20th century indicated to the imminent disintegration of the country, which could also be felt on football fields. The championship football match between Crvena zvezda (Red Star) and Dinamo (May 13, 1990) showed what a dark fate awaits the already seriously divided Yugoslavia (Milenković, 2021, 305).

FIFA AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

Since its inception, the International Football Federation has faced the influence of politics. Right after the end of the First World War, the football associations of Great Britain requested the expulsion of the countries of the Axis Powers from FIFA, not accepting to sit in the same organization with yesterday’s enemies. When FIFA failed to do so, the UK’s football associations renounced their membership. After the return of the Island countries to FIFA membership in 1946, their new political pressure followed with a renewed demand to expel the countries that had started and lost the Second World War. This time, FIFA suspended Germany and Japan and prevented them from participating in the 1950 World Cup qualifications (Milenković & Milenković, 2022, 159-160).

The enthronement and international expansion of FIFA as a global non-governmental organization with political potential began with the presidency of the French football official Jules Rimet (1921–1954) (Tomlinson, 2014), whose initial years of office were characterized by strained relations with the South American confederation CONMEBOL. According to CONMEBOL, the treatment of European colleagues towards them, despite the South American dominance of world football

on the field, was unsatisfactory, which is also indicated by the situation in the FIFA Executive Committee, in which, out of 10 members, the whole South America had one non-permanent seat at the time, while the other seats were occupied by European members (Dietschy, 2013).

In the years before World War II, apart from its interests in Europe and South America, FIFA also turned to other continents that were a bit late in accepting the new sport. Nevertheless, the geopolitical influence of FIFA had to be expanded, especially after the establishment of the World Cup, for which a way of qualifying national teams from still underdeveloped football continents (Africa, North and Central America and Asia) had to be organized. It is worth mentioning the economic problems of many countries that could not send their teams to qualifying matches, as well as frequent wars in unsafe parts of the world that hindered eventual football events (Milenković & Milenković, 2022, 162).

The Algerian National Liberation Front team was based in Tunisia during the Algerian-French war and played matches against some Arab and Eastern Bloc teams. In response to the French Football Federation, FIFA suspended the national associations of Tunisia and Morocco for supporting Algeria (Dietschy, 2013).

The term of Englishman Stanley Rous as FIFA president (1961–1974) was marked by a benevolent attitude towards the imperial relationship of whites in South Africa and a failure to sanction the South African Football Association for obvious racism (Tomlinson, 2014).

In the case of the dispute between China and Chinese Taipei, FIFA played its political role. Since there were two football associations, FIFA recognized in 1952 that the Chinese Football Association is in charge of mainland China, while in June 1954 it admitted to its membership as well the Republic of China Football Association, based in Taiwan. Due to the long-standing resentment of the Chinese Football Associations with the request to expel Taiwan from FIFA and threats to leave FIFA if this was not done, a compromise solution was reached in 1980 when the proposal of the FIFA Executive Committee was adopted for Taiwan to remain a member, but by the name of Chinese Taipei Football Association, as well as to re-accept the Chinese Football Association (Homburg, 2006).

Brazilian João Havelange, who rather autocratically managed FIFA from 1974 to 1998, acted in the style of a skilled politician with exceptional entrepreneurial tendencies. Intending to organize an international football match between Israel and the newly formed Palestinian state in New York, he wanted to show that “football can succeed where politicians cannot” (Tomlinson, 2014). After the failure of Havelange on this matter, the proposal to play a match between Palestine and Israel in 2015 was also made by the next president of FIFA Sepp Blatter (1998-2015) during his visit to the Middle East in a conversation with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Tending to calm the passions down between the two warring parties, Blatter proposed a “peace match”. However, due to the great hostility, it was determined that such a match would be difficult to play in the foreseeable future. In 2017, the president of the Israel Football Association,

Ofer Eini, tried to revive this failed proposal. In this regard, the vice-president of the Palestinian Federation, Susan Shalabi, stated that such a match can only be played between parties who are equal to each other, and not between masters and slaves (Milenković & Milenković, 2022, 165).

The latest intertwining of political events and football can be seen after the beginning of the Russian special operation in neighboring Ukraine on February 24, 2022. FIFA and UEFA initially tried not to be too rigorous in possible sanctions for Russian clubs and the national team, wishing not to allow too much influence of politics on football. Nevertheless, new decisions were made day by day and were more and more rigorous. Originally, the hosting of the UEFA Champions League final for the 2021–22 season was taken from Saint Petersburg and assigned to Paris. Then, Russian clubs and the national team were deprived of hosting international matches without using national symbols and singing the Russian national anthem, and later they were completely expelled from all competitions organized by FIFA and UEFA until further notice (Milenković & Milenković, 2022, 167-168).

The political consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, to which FIFA responded by expelling Russia from all competitions, were also visible at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, when several European federations demanded that their captains wear rainbow-colored armbands, while some captains opted for the colors of the Ukrainian flag (Sportal, 2022). The question arises whether the last football World Cup in Qatar was the most politicized championship so far, as a lot of space was given to political expression and protests regarding the violation of human rights of the LGBT+ population, workers' rights, discrimination against women, the level of corruption in the host country, and political circumstances due to the expulsion of the Russian national team, which have no direct connection to football (BBC, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Football developed itself together with changes in society and at the same time influenced people's lives, their attitudes, thoughts, behaviors, and values. Regardless of the fact that, thanks to globalization, as a process of social connection, it rapidly transformed itself and became popular on a global scale, perennial rivalries between certain clubs, states, and nations persisted in football.

From the very beginning of the joint development with football, the media made their full contribution to the popularization of this sport and as mediators and promoters enabled fans to follow the competitions of national selections and state championships of football clubs. The development of new technologies, the emergence of the Internet and cable channels, the integration of the market and the strengthening of the media industry marked the beginning of the development of the sports-media spectacle that positioned football highly in the world of sports. Football styles changed, matches and tournaments became more and more numerous and accessible to a global audience, the media got a permanent source of income, an inexhaustible topic and popular media content, and politics a tool to exercise control and propaganda.

Football and politics have built a specific relationship from complete neglect to excessive state interference in its development in the sense of controlling and submitting to the interests of power centers, both in autocratic regimes and in democratic societies. The government's great interest in this sport stems from the powerful role it has acquired at the global level, establishing communication between peoples and their policies, highlighting common interests and bringing different cultures together. The impact of football, the mass, spectacularity, power of fans, media presentation contributed to the positioning of football as one of the main instruments of potential political action.

Considering the set goal of the paper to show the position of football in contemporary society with particular reference to the political and media aspect of the relationship between football and society, it can be concluded that the bond between the observed social constituents is very strong and unbreakable. Football as a global sport, on the one hand, represents a powerful source and platform for socio-political action, while, on the other hand, media coverage of probably the most popular sport in the world brings huge financial profit and influence. Therefore, it is completely clear that football is a very profitable and significant partner in the development of social relations.

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