

# SPORTING LIFE AS A VISUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY: THE ROLE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN MEMORY, IDENTITY, AND EMOTION

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## ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explore sports photography as more than a technical means of documentation—as a medium through which personal memories, emotions, bodily experiences, and athletic identity are formed. The analysis adopts an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from psychology, phenomenology of the body, cultural studies, and sport science. Special attention is given to the role of photography in triggering personal memory and affective responses among active and former athletes, as well as to understanding photography as a visual “memory book” of the sporting life. Two forms of communication within sports photography are considered: mediated communication, which involves the interaction between the athlete and the photojournalist, and immediate communication, in which the photographer intuitively and precisely responds to the unfolding of movement. The paper also investigates the role of the photojournalist as an active interpreter of sporting events, whose photographs shape how the public perceives sport. A central focus is the concept of photography as a psychophysical reactivation of the former self, especially significant for former athletes who, through photographs, relive intense moments from their careers. Examples from sports practice and authorial photography illustrate theoretical concepts and show that sports photography represents a unique synthesis of motion, emotion, memory, and visual art. The paper concludes that sports photography is not merely a document of reality, but a dynamic space in which sporting life is preserved, affectively recognized, and re-experienced through visual representation.

**Key words:** sports photography, memory, emotion, body, identity, movement, visual representation

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## INTRODUCTION

Life can be understood as a complex spatio-temporal labyrinth in which the individual is constantly searching for meaning, direction, and balance. According to Viktor Frankl (1985), human existence is grounded in the pursuit of meaning, despite suffering and uncertainty. This pursuit forms the foundation of the labyrinth we move through. The temporal dimension of life refers to maturation, the acquisition of knowledge, and lived experience, while the spatial dimension implies active engagement with one's environment through choices and actions that shape who we are (Giddens, 1991). This labyrinth is both internal and external, personal and social. Sport, as a distinct space of life expression, also represents a symbolic struggle within this labyrinth. The athlete faces numerous challenges, develops self-discipline, and learns how to cope with both failure and victory (Singer, Hausenblas & Janelle, 2001). Experience, as the result of moving through this temporal labyrinth, helps the individual navigate the complexities of life—whether they are an “ordinary person” or a professional athlete.

The life of a professional athlete surpasses the boundaries of everyday life. While the daily lives of non-athletes usually revolve around familiar activities within social and professional contexts, the sporting life is characterized by constant physical strain, high demands, and an unwavering focus on results (Balyi, Way & Higgs, 2013). Still, both types of life offer inspiration for the camera lens, which captures moments full of emotion, symbolism, and dynamism. In athletic life, the synchronicity between temporal and spatial experience provides the foundation for long-term success. The athlete progresses by learning from the past (temporal aspect) and responding in real time through movement and action (spatial aspect) (Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Römer, 1993). These two dimensions support one another, forming the core of professional development. The camera lens, as a technological marvel, operates on principles similar to the human visual system. Both the eye and the camera use light, focus, and lenses to reconstruct reality (Arnheim, 1974). But unlike the human brain, which gradually loses the clarity of visual memory, the camera preserves detail permanently. In this way, photography becomes a visual archive of athletic life, capturing what the senses may have experienced, but memory failed to retain.

Photography has the power to freeze key moments and contribute to the creation of a collective memory of sport (Barthes, 1981; Zelizer, 1998). The most cherished moments of a career remain preserved as visual witnesses of success, emotion, and ambition. At the same time, the lens records the hidden, darker aspects of sport: injuries caused by overtraining, collapse due to doping, or displays of aggression by players or fans. Photography thus becomes a form of critical documentation. It preserves memory but also reminds us of the limits of the body, the ethical dilemmas, and the social pressures that surround professional sport. This builds a visual archive of both the positive and negative dimensions of sport as part of its complex reality.

From the perspective of photographic theory, Susan Sontag's view in *On Photography* (1977) is particularly relevant. She argues that photography is not simply the act of recording reality, but also of controlling and interpreting it. Every

photograph “possesses” the reality it freezes, isolates, and reframes through the photographer’s perspective. In the world of sport, this means that the photographer chooses not only the moment, but also the message that moment conveys. This idea resonates with Roland Barthes’ interpretation of photography as a space between what actually occurred and what the image evokes in the viewer—emotion, sorrow, celebration, or pain (Barthes, 1981). Halla Beloff (1985) sees photography as a cultural product that shapes both personal memory and collective remembrance. In the same spirit, Mike O’Mahony (2018) emphasizes in *Photography and Sport* that sports photography is not limited to documentation. It actively participates in the construction of visual conventions and influences how we perceive sport—from the expression of individual motion and the athletic body to the idea of collective achievement. Gisèle Freund (1980) further problematizes this by stating that photography is never a “pure” document, but a media construction of reality.

Understanding sports photography therefore requires the recognition that the photographer is not a passive observer but an active interpreter and creator of the visual narrative.

This paper aims to offer an integrative perspective on the sporting life through the camera lens, combining metaphorical, lyrical, and scholarly interpretations of athletic moments, movement, and emotion. By approaching photography not only as a visual record, but as a cultural, ethical, and psychological category, the study seeks to understand how it shapes our perception of sport, athletes, and the very concepts of victory and defeat. The starting premise is that photography does not merely document reality—it reshapes it through the photographer’s vision, the event’s context, and the audience’s expectations. Through the analysis of selected sports photographs and a theoretical reflection on their role in broader social and cultural space, the paper aims to illuminate the dynamic relationship between sport, image, and memory.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative, theoretical, and descriptive approach. The theoretical foundation is based on relevant literature from the fields of philosophy of photography, media studies, cultural theory, and sports psychology. The descriptive analysis enables the interpretation of sports photography as a visual and cultural phenomenon. Special attention is given to the context in which a photograph is created, as well as the role of the photographer in shaping its meaning.

### ***Subject of the Study***

The subject of this paper is the sporting life and sports photography, viewed in their mutual interaction. It explores how photography records, shapes, and communicates with the physical, emotional, and social dimensions of sporting experience.

## RESULTS WITH DISCUSSION

### *The Role of Photography in Preserving the Cultural Memory of the Most Significant Moments in Sporting Life*

Photography possesses a transcendent ability to draw us into a unique dimension of existence—what might be called the *spatio-temporal dimension of memory*. This is an inner, mental, and emotional space where we reconstruct personal experiences, connect fragments of the past, and reestablish contact with former versions of ourselves, as well as with people and events that marked different phases of our lives. According to theories of collective and autobiographical memory (Halbwachs, 1992; Hirsch, 2008), visual media—especially photography—not only record the past but actively shape it in accordance with present experiences and meaning. This process of mediation between past and present is at the heart of the theoretical reflections of British author Annette Kuhn (2007), who points out that even photographs from private, everyday contexts inevitably participate in shaping how we see ourselves and the world. Rather than viewing them as objective records, Kuhn reminds us that every photograph functions as a trigger for interpretation—a mediator between what was and how we experience it today.

#### *Photography as a Spatio-Temporal Dimension of Memory*

Kuhn emphasizes that memory is not simply a return to the past, but rather a cultural and subjective reconstruction in which photography acts as a symbolic space where time, emotion, and identity intersect.

A photograph is not merely a visual document of what once was—it is an **emotive medium** that revives personal history in the present moment, shaped by current meaning and perspective. The past and the present are not separate; they “fold into one another,” creating a continuum of meaning. This is what we refer to here as the *spatio-temporal dimension of memory*—an internal space in which a photograph shows not only what was, but what that past means today. In the context of sport, photography gains additional layers. It does not merely depict physical activity; it captures the athlete’s **inner drama**, the personal and professional narrative embedded in each moment. It traces simple and complex movements under specific motor conditions, but also documents moments of triumph and failure, victory and defeat. While athletes overcome physical obstacles through motor skill, photojournalists face another kind of challenge—how to choose the right frame, capture the essence of the moment, and convey emotion to the viewer, often in a fraction of a second. The collection of such photographs can be seen as a **visual autobiography** of the athlete—a kind of memory book in which beginnings, highs, and setbacks unfold. Opening that book means entering a visual narrative in which each photograph becomes a gateway to time, emotion, and identity. Yet this “book” is not made of words in the traditional sense, but of visual-emotional sentences, written with the *photographer’s pen*—the camera lens itself. Photo albums that preserve

such stories are not merely archives, but spaces of mnemonic interaction between past and present, between the individual and their sporting identity. Viewing these images doesn't just spark memory—it activates an inner dialogue between different temporal layers of the self, connecting the present viewer with the former participant in the events. As Conway and Pleydell-Pearce (2000) have shown, this communication forms the foundation of autobiographical memory, in which identity is constructed through narrative and sensory-visual representations of lived experience. Schacter (1996) emphasizes that memory is not a fixed image of the past, but a **constructive process**, in which present context shapes the content and emotional meaning of what we remember. In this light, photography acts as a kind of **neural bridge**—just as synapses in the nervous system connect various points into an integrated network, photographs link fragments of experience into a coherent, though fluid, mnemonic network. This visual network preserves both joyful and painful moments, shaping the athlete's identity through a continuous interaction between memory and current experience. In line with theories of autobiographical memory, this understanding of photography reveals that each image contains more than what was recorded—it embodies what was lived, and what is re-experienced within the subjectively dynamic dimension of the self.

### ***Sports Photographs and the Psychophysical Value of Expressed Movement and Emotion***

Sports photographs often depict athletes in specific biomechanical positions, accompanied by intense psycho-emotional reactions that are clearly visible even to the untrained observer.

Facial expressions, body posture, muscle tension, and gestures become imprinted in the photographic frame, transforming into visual records of intense psychophysical states. These images, which simultaneously contain elements of motion and emotion, are not only valuable to sports media but also hold deep psychological significance for the athletes themselves. To have a moment captured in a specific athletic pose—at the peak of effort, concentration, or celebration—often serves as a source of pride, self-affirmation, and emotional satisfaction. It is not uncommon for athletes to frame such photographs, to preserve and cherish them as symbols of personal value and reminders of a time when they were in the spotlight. These images preserve not only the physical form, but the emotion—sorrow, ecstasy, pain, triumph—and that is what gives photography its power. There is a complex, bidirectional communication between the visual content of a photograph and the psycho-emotional response of the viewer. This is especially true when the viewer is also the subject of the photograph. In such cases, the emotional response is stronger, deeper, and tied to autobiographical memory.

Contemporary studies in visual neuroscience and emotional cognition suggest that viewing personally meaningful images—particularly of oneself in emotionally intense life moments—activates the amygdala, insular cortex, and medial prefrontal cortex, all of which are associated with memory, emotion, and self-identification

(Damasio, 1999; LeDoux, 2002; Phelps, 2006; Freedberg & Gallese, 2007). In this sense, sports photography is not merely a media product—it is a psychological trigger. It can function as a means of self-affirmation, a reminder of personal identity, and an emotional portal into a lived past.

### ***Emotions, Neuroscience, and the Mnemonic Function of Sports Photography***

Photography is not only a medium for moving through the *spatio-temporal dimension of memory*, but also through the *spatio-temporal dimension of emotion*. This further confirms the complexity of the photographic medium and its profound impact on the emotional and mental sphere of human experience. Emotions interact with both recent and distant memories, while photography serves as a mediator in that interaction—activating memory through emotion, and emotion through memory. This dynamic makes photographs deeply emotional experiences. They can evoke joy, pride, and nostalgia, or alternatively, sadness, regret, and melancholy. Particularly powerful are photographs that show athletes in decisive moments of victory, peak motivation, or triumph. In such images, the current self—the one looking—reconnects with the former self, both visually and emotionally. At that point, the *spatio-temporal dimension of memory* is activated, enabling the viewer to “return” to that moment. Simultaneously, the *spatio-temporal dimension of emotion* is engaged, allowing the viewer to feel again what was once lived. This intertwined function of memory and feeling transforms photography into more than a document. It becomes a living emotional and mental space, in which a person temporarily inhabits their own past.

In the context of a sports career—often built from early childhood under the guidance of a coach and a quality pedagogical program—photography plays a crucial role in preserving these formative experiences. Early sporting moments, although filled with uncertainty and challenge, are remembered as the foundation of personal growth. Thanks to photography, these early experiences are preserved on a visual level. It does not simply record; it enables a return—not just to a place or time, but to the affective framework in which the event was originally lived. As Conway and Pleydell-Pearce (2000) have shown, autobiographical memory involves the integration of different time points of the self. Schacter (1996) emphasizes that memory is not a fixed replica of the past but a dynamic construction shaped by present context. In that light, photography functions as a bridge between the “self then” and the “self now”—not only through visual recording, but through emotional reactivation. This is what we refer to in this paper as the *spatio-temporal dimension of memory* and the *spatio-temporal dimension of emotion*—two components that operate in synchronization, returning the individual not only to the scene of the event, but to the emotional tone in which it was lived. Damasio (1999) particularly emphasizes the connection between emotion and memory, which photography activates more deeply than verbal cues. In this sense, photography becomes a neuro-affective guardian of biography, safeguarding from oblivion the moments that, despite their ephemerality, left the deepest imprint. The beginnings of sporting life, later triumphs, victories, celebrations, and personal turning points all become visual landmarks in the map of one’s personal history. As discussed earlier, photography does not allow beautiful

moments to disappear—it arranges, preserves, and invites us to relive them again, within what we might call a *memory book*.

### ***The Challenges and Interpretive Power of Sports Photography and the Photojournalist's Role***

Sport presents a unique challenge for sports photographers, primarily due to the need for precise and timely tracking of athletes through the camera's viewfinder under conditions of rapid, unpredictable, and often explosive movement. Photographers face professional athletes in full motor motion, and their task is to capture "that one moment"—the visual *aha* instant that carries emotional, athletic, and symbolic weight. Such images, born from a combination of technical readiness, sporting intuition, and instinctive reaction, represent the most valuable part of sports photo documentation. These are the photos that spark "media battles," with outlets competing fiercely for exclusive publication rights—often regardless of cost. There exists a strong, interdependent connection between sport, the athlete, sports photography, and the sports photojournalist. Sport cannot gain widespread popularity without media visibility through photography. Photography cannot exist without athletes as subjects, and the photojournalist cannot succeed without deep knowledge of sport, movement, rhythm of play, and visual aesthetics. He or she must be both an interpreter of movement, a reader of the game, and an aesthete of composition. However, this role is not merely technical—it is also cultural, symbolic, and communicative. As John Berger (1972) states, "*the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe.*" The sports photographer doesn't simply record movement, but **interprets the moment**, directs the viewer's attention, and constructs a visual narrative that contributes to **collective memory**. Susan Sontag (1977) adds that photography is not neutral—it is an act of power. It determines what will be remembered, what will be forgotten, and how something will be represented. In this sense, the sports photojournalist becomes a visual mediator between what happens on the field and how it is perceived by the public. He doesn't just document a moment—he creates history. In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes (1980) distinguishes between *studium*—what we intellectually understand in a photograph—and *punctum*—what emotionally "pierces" us. Sports photography often contains both: it informs us about the event (*studium*), but also strikes us emotionally (*punctum*), whether through pride, pain, excitement, or loss. It is precisely this emotional power of photography that makes it a connective tissue between sport, the audience, and the media.

For the athlete, a photograph is not just a memento. It becomes a visual testimony of individual and collective progress—a way to recognize the journey taken, the effort invested, and the achievements earned. Athletes do not forget what they have endured to become who they are. And the sports photojournalist is the one who enables that return. He is closest to the decisive moment happening on the field, and he is the one who eternally captures the defining scenes of a sporting nation's history, especially in the context of national or international competition.

## ***Types of Communication in Sports Photography***

In sports photography, two fundamental types of communication can be identified, both of which enable the photojournalist to operate effectively within the dynamics of a sporting event:

1. Mediated communication with athletes, and
2. Immediate communication with movement.

**Mediated sports-photographic communication** involves the conscious, direct participation of athletes in the photographic process. It is based on personal interaction and prior consent, and often occurs in contexts outside the game itself. Examples of this type of communication include: a) group positioning of players before the start of a match; b) individual posing of the most valuable player after a victory, at the request of the photographer; c) staged photo shoots for media covers or promotional material, often in choreographed poses.

**Immediate communication**, on the other hand, does not require the athlete's awareness or consent. It occurs between movement and lens, that is, between motor action and the photographer's eye. In this relationship, the photographer acts as a mediator, interpreting patterns of motion using technical tools such as telephoto lenses to "capture" details that are of interest to the sports press and public. This process may be described as a visual transcription of ideomotor activity: from the imagined action in the athlete's mind, through the activation of sensorimotor nerve fibers, to the final muscular contraction. Photography, in this sense, does not merely document movement; it reveals the entire psychomotor process, from intention to execution. From the perspective of anthropomotorics, this type of communication represents a visible projection of the internal preparation for movement, which the camera is able to fix at the most representative moment. Sensorimotor and kinesthetic receptors allow the athlete to execute both simple and highly complex motor tasks, but it is only photography that makes those processes visible, intelligible, and memorable.

## ***Bodily Memory and the Aesthetic Dimension of Movement***

Unlike conventional photography, sports photography serves a dual purpose. On one hand, it allows a return to earlier periods of life through the *spatio-temporal dimension of memory* and the *spatio-temporal dimension of emotion*. On the other hand, it captivates us with the aesthetic of movement and the biomechanical complexity of the human body in motion. When observing a sports photograph, the viewer is often struck by the skill, explosiveness, balance, and flexibility contained in a single movement. This is especially true for those unfamiliar with the artistic side of motor intelligence and the aesthetic structure of the human body in space and time. Sports photography, in this sense, engages multiple dimensions of personality: cognitive, motor, sensory-kinesthetic, emotional and visual. In contrast, classical photography primarily engages cognitive, emotional, and visual dimensions, without direct connection to bodily motion in its full functional form. Both classical

and sports photography enable “spatio-temporal” travel through memories of different life stages. But sports photography uniquely reanimates the body in motion—not just the event as an emotional background. As previously discussed in this paper, one of photography’s greatest strengths lies in its ability to enable intrapersonal communication—a dialogue between the present self and the former self. This also applies to the athlete who, when viewing photographs from different phases of their career, mentally reconstructs the movements they were once capable of performing due to high levels of flexibility, strength, and control. In such moments, memory is not just narrative—it is bodily. It is tied to the internal representation of movement, to the felt sense of execution, and to the spatial-temporal coordinates in which that movement took place. This understanding is supported by the concept of bodily memory from the phenomenology of the body, which views the body not merely as a performer of movement, but also as a keeper of experience. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) argued that the body possesses a kind of knowledge that cannot be reduced to verbal or conscious levels. He refers to this as *perceptual consciousness*—awareness rooted in bodily practice. Similarly, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (1999), in her work on kinetic consciousness, emphasizes that movement is not a secondary expression of experience—it is its primary form. In this context, sports photography becomes the visual trace of bodily knowledge—its image, fixation, and symbol. It is the place where the past is remembered not only by the mind, but by the body itself.

### ***Visual Reactivation of Bodily and Emotional Memory***

For former athletes, a photograph represents far more than a simple memory or visual document. It becomes a trigger for ideomotor reactivation, allowing mental return to moments of full physical and athletic capability, even if the locomotor system has since lost its previous functionality. When observing a photograph of their own body in motion—taken during peak performance—the retired athlete does not see a stranger, but rather becomes an active participant in the internal reconstruction of movement. Muscle memory, the internal representation of motion, and the emotion connected to that moment all resurface in a single visual scene. This is an example of what Merleau-Ponty (1945) called “*perceptual bodily consciousness*”—a form of knowledge that is not verbal, but embedded in the body, and that survives even when the body is no longer active. In this context, photography acts as a trigger for both motor and affective memory. It links imagined movement with actual movement from the past, reviving ideomotor pathways that were once part of training, competition, and victory. The former athletes once again feel themselves—not only cognitively, but within the body. It is not just the movement that is reconstructed—the emotion attached to that movement also returns. The person who sees themselves jumping, throwing, shooting, or celebrating once again relives the joy, tension, and exhilaration as they once did. In this sense, photography connects not just two points in time, but two emotional realities of the same individual: the one who once existed at full strength, and the one who now bears witness to that past. This way of experiencing photography aligns with the thinking

of Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (1999), who emphasizes the primacy of movement in the formation of experience, and Conway & Pleydell-Pearce (2000), who suggest that autobiographical memory is based on the integration of different temporal layers of the self. Photography thus acts as a medium of psychophysical reactivation of the former self: it does not merely show what once was—it enables what once was to be relived within what is now.

Based on this, we may conclude that a personal or sports photo album functions as a kind of “*spatio-temporal mirror*”—a reflection of both past and present versions of the self. It visually archives achievements, moments of victory and defeat, encounters with others, and key episodes of physical, emotional, and existential movement. In this sense, the “*memory book*” becomes a visual mnemonic map, one that not only preserves the past but reactivates it in the present, ensuring the continuity of personal identity. The photographs in such an album do not simply say what once was—they allow us to feel it again, in light of present emotion, maturity, and perspective.

### ***The Photo-Narrative of Sporting Life Through Examples***

A sporting life is filled with challenges and transformations that shape a young person into a mature athlete. From the first steps on the field to the peak of one’s career, every phase carries its own meaning and value—and it is sports photography that documents, preserves, and visually articulates that journey. The earliest photographs of a young athlete often later become cherished as precious visual beginnings, a gateway into a time that laid the foundation for their athletic and personal development. By observing these images, the former athlete, through the *spatio-temporal dimension of memory*, returns to the emotions, movements, and contexts that shaped their identity. The role of the sports photojournalists in this process is profound: they don’t simply capture moments—they build a photo-narrative of a life, transforming the fleeting into the lasting. Their photographs become the basis of a “*memory book*”, which the athlete later reads as testimony and confirmation of their growth. Understanding the relationship between sport, the athlete, photography, and the photojournalist means grasping how cultural memory is shaped within space and time.

**Sports photography is not merely documentation—it is also an artistic interpretation of movement, a testimony to history, and a visual foundation of the athlete’s identity.**

The beauty of a captured movement, frozen at just the right moment, holds value not only for the photojournalist or the media, but above all, for the athlete—who sees in it not just an image, but a reflection of their lived experience.



Photo by: Miloš Stamenković / Спортски журнал.

Caption for Photograph 1. The most important role of photography is to capture the very first steps taken in sport.



Photo by: Miloš Stamenković/Спортски журнал.

Caption for Photograph 2. Matches of national importance present a true challenge for sports photojournalists, as these are the games that determine direct qualification for European or World Championships. This means that concentration must be at its highest level in order to capture the decisive moment—such as a goal that could change the entire course of the match.



Photo by: Miloš Stamenković/Спортски журнал.

**Caption for Photograph 3.** The role of sports photography is to capture combative moments that are difficult to perceive with the naked eye, yet become clearly visible through the “photographic eye” of the camera lens and the intuition of the sports photojournalist. This image illustrates that professional handball is not only characterized by highly demanding movements—physiologically speaking—but also by intense physical clashes that often resemble wrestling in their struggle to score for the team. Here, we see a striking example of communication between the camera and athletic motion, demonstrating the vital importance of immediate, instinctive photo-sport interaction. This type of visual exchange is essential not only for documenting such moments, but also for their inclusion in leading sports newspapers and major media platforms.



Photo by: Miloš Stamenković/Спортски журнал.

**Caption for Photograph 4.** Sporting events draw significant public attention, especially during major matches between prominent domestic clubs. A charged atmosphere often amplifies emotional intensity on the field, as loyal supporters

serve as a psychological catalyst—motivating players to give their utmost in pursuit of victory. The power of sports photography lies in its artistic and visual ability to portray, in its own unique language, the communication between fans in the stands and athletes fiercely fighting for every point. This photograph captures a compelling example of that emotional transfer, where the positive energy of the crowd visibly reaches the players.

Sports photography goes beyond documenting movement; it also captures the psycho-emotional reactions of athletes, coaches, and fans—whose wide-open eyes and deep concentration reflect the unfolding drama on the field. The connection between the psychological-emotional components of human experience and the photographic detail captured by the photojournalist makes such images rich, layered, and full of meaning.



Photo by: Miloš Stamenković/Спортски журнал.

**Caption for Photograph 5.** Sports photography does not capture only the most beautiful moments of the game—it also bears witness to those that are far less pleasant, first and foremost for the athlete, but also for the audience and the image itself. Injuries are a common occurrence in matches and competitions, often resulting from the biomechanical demands of certain disciplines and the complexity of movement patterns guided by ideomotor and anthropomotor principles under highly dynamic, situational-motor conditions. In many cases, injury occurs when the athlete's own movement—during the execution of complex motor actions aimed at scoring—is abruptly interrupted by the forceful motion of an opposing player. The intensity of the collision between two movement trajectories, especially when combined with direct physical contact—such as lower-limb tackles during ball possession—often determines the severity of the injury. Football duels are of particular value in sports photography because they not only document extreme physical confrontation, but also portray football as a form of “locomotor art,” centered around the ever-present “round white miracle”—the ball—whose final destination must be the opponent's net.



Photo by: Miloš Stamenković/Спортски журнал.

**Caption for Photograph 6.** Joy is an essential part of life—for both ordinary individuals and those who have devoted themselves to a professional sports career. It fills the body from within, generating powerful emotional waves that engage both upper and lower limbs, resulting in expressive, full-body communication among teammates: wide smiles, energetic gestures, and animated glances exchanged on the field. When such moments are captured by the camera, they become invaluable over time—allowing athletes, in moments of reflection, to relive the same emotions once shared at the height of the game. As previously discussed in this paper, emotions are inseparable from photography, just as photography is deeply embedded in the emotional fabric of human experience. Simply put, photography communicates with our emotions in its own visual language—and our emotions respond in return, shaped by how the image reflects the reality we once lived.

### *Visual Synthesis of Memory and Movement*

**The photo-narrative, as a visual whole, operates on multiple levels:** it is not merely a document, but also a trigger for cognitive-emotional and ideomotor processes. When individuals observe themselves in certain sporting moments, they do not merely remember—they **mentally reconstruct the movement**, which in turn evokes specific emotions tied to the meaning of those moments. In this way, photography becomes a kind of **visual synthesis of memory, emotion, and motor imagination**.

### *Advantages and Limitations of the Study*

The advantage of this paper lies in its interdisciplinary approach, which combines psychology, phenomenology, sports science, and visual culture. Through theoretical analysis and practical examples, it offers a comprehensive perspective on how photography contributes to the shaping of memory, identity, and emotional experience in sport. By integrating scientific knowledge with the visual and experiential aspects

of sports life, the paper opens a path for new interpretations of the athlete's internal world and the cultural role of photography in sport. However, the study is not without limitations. The lack of quantitative research, such as surveys or interviews with athletes and photographers, limits the empirical strength of the conclusions. In addition, the examples used are drawn from the author's own photographic archive, which may raise the question of subjective selection. Nevertheless, this paper's goal was not to generalize, but to initiate discussion about the deeper meanings of sports photography, and to offer a framework for future empirical and theoretical research.

### ***Theoretical Contribution: The Spatio-Temporal Dimension of Emotion***

Within this paper, a conceptual framework is proposed that expands the scope of existing theories of visual memory and autobiographical recall. Specifically, it introduces the notion of the "*spatio-temporal dimension of emotion*", conceived as a complement to the well-established *spatio-temporal dimension of memory*. While the latter involves the mental reconstruction of past experiences triggered by visual stimuli, the former emphasizes the affective re-experiencing of those moments in the present. In this context, photography does not merely serve as a document or archival artifact—it functions as an emotive medium, capable of activating an inner dialogue between different temporal layers and evolving versions of the self. Viewing photographs from one's sporting life—particularly those captured during decisive moments of victory, triumph, or pain—simultaneously evokes both the memory of the event and the emotion originally felt. This dual-layered effect of photography finds theoretical grounding in the work of Schacter (1996), Conway and Pleydell-Pearce (2000), and Damasio (1999), all of whom emphasize the intrinsic relationship between memory and emotion. A similar perspective is offered by Annette Kuhn (2007), who argues that photographs function as symbolic spaces in which the past is not only remembered but also emotionally re-experienced. The proposed concept of the *spatio-temporal dimension of emotion* holds significant potential for further theoretical and methodological application across several research fields, including:

- visual culture,
- sports psychology,
- and autobiographical and cultural memory.

This concept facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the role of photography in the construction of personal identity—particularly in contexts saturated with affective intensity, such as sporting events.

## **CONCLUSION**

Sports photography is not merely a tool for documentation—it is a visual space where memory, identity, and emotion converge. By freezing movement and preserving expression, it enables both athletes and observers to return to decisive moments and reconstruct the personal and collective narratives that define sporting life. The photographic frame is more than a static image; it is a visual sentence

written with light—one that communicates tension, victory, effort, and emotion. For the former athlete, photography serves as a psychophysical reactivation of the former self—a means of reconnecting with experiences that shaped their identity, values, and worldview. The sports photojournalist plays a key interpretive role—not only by capturing the event, but by constructing its visual meaning. Through their gaze, instinct, and sense of rhythm, the photographer becomes a silent narrator of a dynamic, emotionally charged human story. This paper underscores the need to understand photography not merely as a medium of representation, but as a space of encounter—between past and present, movement and memory, body and image. Ultimately, sports photography offers a unique synthesis of art, motion, and lived experience. Its true value lies not only in what it shows, but in what it enables us to feel, to remember, and to become.

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