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Most Popular but Absent: Football and the 1924 Argentine Olympic Team

The origins of football in Argentina can be traced back to the late 1860s. The Buenos Aires Football Club was founded in 1867 and the first match recorded was played that same year between two teams from the club. In the next few decades British expatriates, mostly English, systematized the practice of football in Argentina. Although it took some years for the newly independent nation to accept the novel practice, clubs started to flourish outside the British colony. By the end of the nineteenth century football had become an integral part of Argentine culture. Its adoption could be seen in the diffusion of the game over the country and in the transformation of British football discourses into an Argentine lexicon. For example, after the turn of the century it was decided that the meetings of the Argentine football governing body had to be conducted in Spanish.

This paper examines the reasons behind the failure of the Argentine Olympic Committee to send an Olympic football team to the 1924 Olympic Games. The formation of the Olympic team brought to the surface many underlying tensions between the Olympic Committee and the Argentine Confederation of Sport – which at that time were fighting to control Argentine sports. Argentine football, itself in the middle of a serious internal rift, was trapped in the dispute between the two organizations. Although Argentine football participation in Paris was a matter of national concern, an agreement proved impossible even after mediation by the Minister of Justice and Public Instruction. The absence of a team representing Argentina's most popular sport was sorely disappointing, especially after its South American rival Uruguay won the Olympic football tournament. On the other hand, the nation's participation in the 1924 Olympics was an achievement in itself. It provided a way for Argentina to make its mark in the community of nations. The history of these events raises questions about how nations use sport to shape identities, the class dimensions of this process, and hegemony and resistance. In this paper I explore these issues by profiling the major figures in

the struggle to send a football team to Paris, detailing the political conflicts that this sparked, and illuminating the complex social dynamics of the debate.



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