



## *Sport and politics in Croatia - Athletes as National Icons in History Textbooks*

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### INTRODUCTION

Sport has often been considered primarily as an entertainment. Because of this, its various cultural influences on daily life are often ignored. However, the importance of sport in the global economy and its association with various industries and media points to its growing influence in modern society. Sports mega-events, in particular the Olympic Games and the football World Cup, are obvious examples (Cornelissen and Maennig 2010). In this paper we shall not deal with multiple connections between sport and social processes, but we shall focus on the relationship between sport and politics in the education system. The aim of this study is to determine the selection and interpretation of sporting events used in education through the content analysis of Croatian history textbooks, published in the period from 1918 to present. In the end we have analysed 51 textbooks. Our focus was mainly on the manner in which individual and team successes of Croatian athletes have been used in the process of (re)construction of national identity through history textbooks. Considering that in this period Croatia was a part of different states, results of the summary analysis of the studied textbooks according to the political systems within which they were used for educational purposes are as follows:



	Number of textbooks	Sport as a topic
Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1941)	10	0
Independent State Of Croatia (1941-1945)	4	0
Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1945-1991)	10	2
Republic of Croatia (1991-2014)	27	27

Table 1. Summary analysis of the studied history textbooks

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SPORT, NATION AND POLITICS

The connection between sports and politics can be traced to ancient times, but it has been especially evident since the beginnings of modern sport in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sport became a global phenomenon during the interwar period (1918-1939), but its role in international political relations strengthened especially after the Second World War, in the period of the Cold War and the simultaneous process of decolonization. Accordingly, subsequent research into the relationship between sports and politics has largely dealt with the role of sport in the process of (re)constructing national identities. It should be noted that representatives of all major approaches to the concept of nation – modernists, ethno-symbolists and perennialists – agree on the importance of sport in the process of its (re)construction.

The authors who have studied the role of sport in the process of nation (re)construction have usually understood the nation in terms of Anderson's *imagined community* (Hobsbawm 1983; Cronin and Mayall 1998: 2; Bairner 2001: 5, 16; Smith and Porter 2004: 4-5; Jarvie 1993). They have also often referred to Hobsbawm, who emphasized the importance of sport as an element of secular nationalism which allows us to participate in highly charged emotional experiences. In accordance with his modernist views of the origins of the nation, Hobsbawm claims that sport provides "invention of tradition" which is then used in the creation of a national mythology. During that process, athletes take on the role of national icons because an "imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people" (Hobsbawm 1990: 143). According to Smith's theory of ethno-symbolism, which emphasizes the importance of cultural elements such as symbols, myths, rituals, shared values and different kinds of rites and ceremonies, sports events represent one of the important elements of nation-creation. They all help to create and sustain communal bonds and a sense of national identity (Smith 2009: 14, 25). Perennialists



have also stressed the use of sport in the process of national identity building, emphasizing the connection between sport and the process of legitimation of the “national historicity” (Bairner 2009: 228-229).

Regarding research on the process of nation (re)construction by means of sport in modern societies, Billig’s theory of “banal nationalism” (1995) deserves special mention. He analyses the processes of nationalisms in already constituted nation-states. His main thesis states that national myths and symbols are not present only in extreme situations, but always. The feeling of national identity is built on a daily basis, and sport plays an important part in this process. Sporting events are characterized by a large presence of national symbols, which results in a constant reconstruction of national identity. As they have become “national ambassadors”, i.e. modern national heroes and icons that spread the glory of the nation they represent, national sports and athletes can be considered as one of the fundamental myths of modern society. Correspondingly, Bairner (2001) claims that all nation-states actively participate in the implementation of nationalistic politics by creating a national mythology and inventing tradition with the aim of self-promotion. Likewise, we posit the main thesis of this paper, according to which athletic achievements of Croatian athletes have been used in the process of (re)construction of the national identity. We argue that during that process athletes become national icons, which we shall try to confirm by the content analysis of Croatian history textbooks.

## MODERNIZATION AND CROATIAN POLITICAL HERITAGE

History textbooks have had a key role in the promotion and dissemination of official historical narratives. Nevertheless, there is a lack of systematic and comparative research on this topic. Consequently, it has been decided to undertake research on Croatian history textbooks as a case study, using a diachronic approach covering the period from 1918 to 2014. In this period Croatia was a part of different states and political systems: the authoritarian and multinational Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia (1918-1941); the fascist Independent State of Croatia (1941-1945); the socialist and multinational Yugoslavia (1945-1991); while since 1991 Croatia has been an independent democratic republic, which joined the European Union in 2013. As changes in dominant historic discourses followed political changes, Croatian historical experience provides us with an extremely interesting case study, which will be analysed in the context of the theory of modernization of Croatian society proposed by Rogić (2000). He distinguishes three phases of the process: “primitive capitalist modernization” (1868-1945); “paradoxical modernization” (1945-1991) and “transition” (since 1991).

In the first period, modernization was essentially determined by the paradox of double periphery, because Croatia was located on the outskirts of the Austro-



Hungarian Empire, which was the periphery in relation to European front-runners in the process. Rogić named the second phase of modernization of Croatian society “paradoxical” because it was achieved in a totalitarian atmosphere. Only after Croatia proclaimed its independence in 1991 was the framework for the third phase of modernization achieved – the transition to a capitalist and democratic reality. Therefore, he concludes that the continuity of development of modern civic society in Croatia is one of modernization discontinuities. This syntagm summarizes all the radical social and political conflicts and changes that typify the modernization of Croatian society. Each new stage of the modernization of Croatian society involved a dramatic institutional, cultural, symbolic, and discursive break with the legacy of the previous period. That was one of the main reasons why history education in Croatia has always in some degree served as a mechanism for validating a dominant political narrative. We argue that the role of athletes and sport in general has steadily become more important in the process of (re)construction of the national identity as the process of modernization evolves. Consequently, its great importance in the nation-building process in Croatia has been evident in the last stage of modernization (after 1991), when sport played an extremely important role in the degradation of the socialist historical narrative and the simultaneous creation of the alternative narrative (the narrative of “brotherhood and unity” between the South Slavic peoples was replaced with the narrative of “millennial dream of an independent Croatia”).

#### THE ROLE OF SPORT IN THE PROCESS OF (RE)CONSTRUCTION OF CROATIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

The roots of modern sport in Croatia are related to the Sokol movement, which originated in Czech lands in 1862. Its leaders were liberal bourgeois who propagated the political, economic and cultural independence of the Slavic peoples within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The first Croatian Sokol society was founded in 1874 in Zagreb, and by 1914 as many as 169 local organizations were established in Croatian territories and in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

When World War I broke out, Sokol organizations were banned, but immediately after the war ended, the Sokol association of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was organized. In 1920 the association changed its name into the Yugoslav Sokol association, in accordance with the unitary idea of one single Yugoslav nation. However, as early as 1922 the Croatian Sokol association was re-formed, advocating the uniqueness of the Croatian nation. It is thus obvious that sport activities in Croatia were subordinated to politics and the spread of national ideologies from their beginnings. In 1929 King Alexander established a dictatorship and banned existing Sokol associations. Instead he formed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia Sokol association, aiming to use it as a vehicle for spreading the Yugoslav idea (Hrستیć 2011: 79-82,



Rohdewald 2013). Besides Sokol associations, various sports clubs have been founded in Croatia ever since the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while the Croatian sports association was founded in 1909. Their activities were also strongly influenced by politics, which, just as was happening on an international level, came to the fore especially during the interwar period. This was the result of the clash between the Croatian and Yugoslav national ideologies. To illustrate this point we can single out the boycott of the Yugoslav football league and Yugoslav national team in 1930, on the part of Croatian football clubs and Croatian footballers due to the transfer of the football association headquarters from Zagreb to Belgrade. Croatian players did not play for Yugoslavia at the World Cup held in Uruguay in 1930, where the Yugoslav national team won a bronze medal. After the capitulation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Axis Powers established the fascist Independent State of Croatia (1941). Due to the war, sports competitions continued irregularly. Sokol organizations were banned because of their earlier pro-Yugoslav activities, while sports clubs continued with their activities, but in accordance with the totalitarian nature of the new state system, which sought “to create a new order and a new society” based on a homogeneous Croatian nation. Thus, sport was used as an important educational mechanism (Miljan 2015).

After the end of World War II, Croatia became a part of the socialist Yugoslavia, which was also a totalitarian, but communist state. So, despite the radical ideological change, the governmental structures continued to blatantly use sport for political purposes. Sokol organizations were replaced by socialist associations of physical culture, but next to the national teams, sports clubs played a major role in the spread of political messages during this period. Therefore, communists banned sports clubs that were active during the war and formed new clubs, following the Soviet totalitarian model. Special attention was given to the national teams, which were supposed to symbolize the unity of the nation and the power of the state (Perica 2001; Rohdewald 2013). Thus they can be perceived as national projects evolving over the whole period between 1945 and 1990. However, inter-ethnic and inter-national disputes within Yugoslavia re-emerged in the late 1980s. It became clear that the project to create a brotherly and unified atmosphere had failed. This was especially evident in sports arenas, where “hot” forms of nationalism were expressed (Billig 1995: 43-46). The latter culminated in 1991, just before the start of the four-year war in Croatia. As the most famous examples, we can single out the great clash between football clubs Dinamo (Zagreb) and Red Star (Belgrade) fans on May 13<sup>th</sup> 1990, as well as the interruption of the football match between Hajduk (Split) and Partizan (Belgrade) in Split on September 26<sup>th</sup> 1990, when Hajduk fans invaded the pitch and burned the Yugoslav flag. Soon after, the first international match of the Croatian national football team was organized. It was played in Zagreb against the USA football team on October 17<sup>th</sup> 1990, and it turned into a great national event. The game was followed by the restoration of the Ban Josip Jelačić' (Croatian national hero from the



19<sup>th</sup> Century) monument in Zagreb's main square. As the monument was removed in 1947 because Jelačić's historical role did not fit the socialist narrative, its restoration symbolized a fundamental political and ideological change (Đorđević 2012; Brentin 2013).

During the Homeland war (1991-1995) the presence of national symbols in everyday life was particularly emphasized. The young country tried to affirm itself through sport. Croatian politicians, particularly the first president of Croatia Franjo Tuđman, often emphasized the role of athletes as the most important promoters of Croatia in the world. At the same time, prominent athletes were seizing every opportunity to emphasize their relationship with the Croatian people, trying to spread the word about the situation in Croatia (Bellamy 2003; Brentin 2013). The national teams (football, basketball, handball, water-polo etc.), as well as the most prominent athletes (Ivanišević, Petrović, Boban, Šimenc etc.) played a key role in this process. In this period the professional clubs have been of secondary importance as, due to the poor general conditions in Croatian sport, they were unable to have a significant impact at an international level, as well as due to their primary connection to particular regions or social groups. Thus, despite the state being rather new and the radical change of the social system – which can be interpreted as the “modernization discontinuity” – this practice confirms the continuity of relations between politics and sport in Croatia. One of the most striking examples is Dražen Petrović, a basketball player and the national team captain who was the most popular athlete of Yugoslavia in the 1980s – but who practically immediately after the break-up of Yugoslavia became a Croatian national sports icon. Like some other Croatian sports stars (Stojko Vranković, Goran Ivanišević etc.), he used his fame to inform the world about the situation in Croatia. So, thanks to their sporting achievements and their political activities, they became national icons. Their sporting successes were interpreted as national victories, which in the end led to the creation of a certain myth about the phenomenon of Croatian sport, which despite the modest means and the small population can boast amazing results. However, it must be stressed that this myth is not characteristic of Croatia only, but can be identified in numerous “small” nations, which through sport prove their “greatness” and turn disadvantages into advantages (Maguire et al. 2002). In Croatia during the 1990s, the change of social system, the national identity (re)construction process and introduction of democracy – which was followed by continuous political communication between the newly established political parties and the citizens – all culminated in the “construction of the political spectacle” and “estradiation” of politics (Edelman 1988; Van Zoonen 2003).<sup>1</sup> All of this enabled some popular athletes to become important political actors.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Estradiation of politics has been an important feature of political communication since the 1980s. The process evolves in the social context within which public is more interested in style, personality and visibility of political actors than in the content of their political attitudes. Thus, their image becomes more important than political messages they send. Meyer (2003: 64) claims that



## SPORT IN CROATIAN HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

History textbooks represent an important tool in the construction and dissemination of “official” historical narratives in all states and societies. Not only do they provide the facts about the past, they at the same time reflect the present. They are primarily focused on national history and contain a chronological sequence of political events, which is why social history topics like sports are very slowly becoming a part of the educational curriculum (Petrungaro 2009: 1-2). This is one of the reasons why, despite the relatively extensive literature on the use of history textbooks in the process of (re)construction of national identity, the issue of the role of sport within them has never been problematized. At the same time, historians in Croatia deem sport to be a less important topic than some other, “more historical” topics.

We argue that sport in history textbooks generally has an auto-representative function, which contributes to the (re)construction of the nation in Anderson’s notion of “imagined community”. In that process, and in accordance with Hobsbawm's and Billig's theories, prominent athletes are becoming national icons. It can therefore be concluded that the role of sport in the process of nation (re)construction is not important only because of the active or passive involvement in particular sports events, but also because the connections created by participation in such emotionally charged situations are strong enough to induce a state of what Dürkheim (1995) calls “collective effervescence”.

It results in stronger solidarity and group cohesion among all members of a nation. Sports events also support Weber’s (1978) claim that in order for a social group to come into being, its members have to engage in exclusive social interaction that has no extrinsic purpose. In other words, to form a group, individuals have to gather together in exclusive moments in order to affirm their special relationship with each other. This is one of the reasons why nation-states are determined to remind people of their most significant sporting successes, when national pride and unity usually reach their peak. By promoting athletes they are also providing role models, which are especially important in education and among the youngest members of the society. Nation-states use all these means to confirm a current set of social norms and values. That is why history textbooks generally emphasize only the positive aspects of sport,

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politicians use their image to present themselves as the personification of characteristics that are particularly appreciated within their community.

<sup>2</sup> As an illustration, we can single out some of the most famous Croatian athletes who were active in politics: Dražen Petrović, Franjo Arapović, Stojko Vranković, Ivano Balić, Petar Metličić, Niko Kovač, Robert Kovač, Goran Ivanišević. Since the mid-1990s some athletes have even become PM's in the Croatian Parliament: Franjo Arapović, Lino Červar, Perica Bukić, Damir Škaro, Vedran Rožić, Danira Nakić, Mirko Filipović and Biserka Perman.



while the negative ones (doping, corruption etc.) are mentioned only occasionally, just as our research on Croatian history textbooks has shown.

In our analysis we have included history textbooks for the final grades of primary and secondary schools in the period from 1918 to 2014. It is important to note that apart from the slightly greater importance given to sport in the most recent high school textbooks in comparison to those for primary school, we have not observed significant differences in content between textbooks used in primary and secondary education. In this context it must be also noted that in Croatia up to the mid-1990s there was one textbook per course for each grade. Before World War II they were issued mainly by the Ministry of Education, while in 1950 the state publishing house for school textbooks, which had a monopoly up to the 1990s, was established. The textbook market was then liberalized, which is why a number of textbooks for each course have appeared, but each one of them still had to be approved by the Ministry of Education (Agičić and Najbar-Agičić 2007: 204). Regarding the researched period, we took 1918 as the starting point because only in the period between the two world wars has sport become a global phenomenon. During the same period the connection between sport and politics in Croatia became evident too, because only from the interwar period onwards can we follow the use of modern sport (except Sokol organizations) in politics. Since then, in accordance with Rogić's theory on "modernization discontinuities", Croatian history textbooks have been used to demythologize national heroes of previous eras and to construct new national pantheons – not only by revitalization of neglected icons, but also by creation of new icons (Koren and Baranović 2009; Petrungaro 2009: 100). With the modernization of Croatian society the importance of sports has grown, which is why in the third phase of modernization athletes have started to take on the role of secular icons, just like prominent politicians, warriors, kings etc. have done in the past.

Out of the 51 analysed textbooks, sport was mentioned and problematized in 29 of them, 27 of which were printed in the period after 1992. Until then, 24 textbooks were published, but sport was mentioned only in 2 of them, while after 1992 it has become included, to a greater or lesser extent, in absolutely every textbook. Given the time needed for a given social phenomenon to receive confirmation of its social importance and to be included in history textbooks, especially considering that those textbooks are relatively closed to the topics from social history, sport appeared in Croatian history textbooks only in 1972. In the textbook published that year was the picture of football club Hajduk from 1944 after they had fled from Split and joined the partisans. From then until the end of the war they played as the team of the national liberation army. The accompanying text emphasized their contribution to the promotion of the National Liberation War, which was led by the communists and which was the founding myth of the socialist Yugoslavia.<sup>3</sup> In the text it was also noted

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<sup>3</sup> For more on this topic see: Perasović and Mustapić 2014



that most of the partisan units had their own sports teams that competed against each other between battles, all of which contributed to the popularization of the Partisan movement in the country (Pavličević and Čubelić 1972: 235). Thus, the mention of sport served only to confirm the dominant historical narrative on which the entire social system was based. Nevertheless, the inclusion of sport in the history textbooks indirectly confirmed the fact that sport has become one of the dominant aspects of everyday life. Still, due to the aforementioned reluctance of history textbook authors to include similar topics more frequently, changes have occurred rather slowly.



Picture 1. Football team of Hajduk in 1944 (Pavličević and Čubelić 1972: 235).

Until the 1990s sport as a topic appeared only in the textbook written by Bilandžić et al. (1986: 44-45, 100), who outlined basic information about the beginnings of modern sport, in a few sentences only, with a focus on the history of the Olympics. Given that was the first time the history of sport was not just a caption next to a picture, but a part of the main text and thus part of the compulsory school curriculum, it was still progress. In addition to the short text, two black and white photographs of poor quality were included: the ice rink in Zagreb at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, again, the football club of Hajduk. In the remaining 22 textbooks analysed from the period of 1918 to 1991 sport did not even get a mention.

The real turning point in the portrayal of sport in Croatian history textbooks came the 1990s. The first textbook published after the declaration of independence of the Republic of Croatia had already dedicated more attention to the history of sports. The focus was on the history of the Olympics, but some basic information on the beginnings of sport in Croatia was included too. In an attempt to achieve total



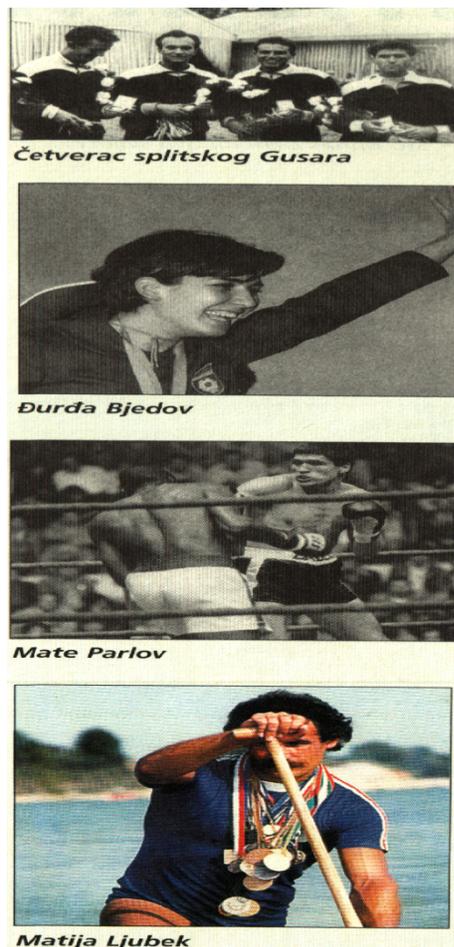
separation from Yugoslavia, which was at the time the enemy in the war for independence, the period after 1945 was not mentioned at all (Perić 1992). In the textbook printed in the following year, even more space was given to the history of sport, again with the main focus on the Olympics, but this was the first time modern Croatian athletes were mentioned individually. From the period of socialist Yugoslavia, Olympic champions who originated from Croatia were listed: Đurđica Bjedov (1968 – swimming 100 m breaststroke), Mate Parlov (1972 – boxing) and Matija Ljubek (1976 – canoe). The teams which they represented, however, were not mentioned, and neither were the accomplishments of other Yugoslav national sports teams – even though Croats usually played significant parts in them (Perić 1993).

Competition on the history textbook market after its liberalization and the evolution of the modernization process, followed by the further growth in the importance of sport in everyday life, influenced both the quantity and the quality of the representation of sport. As a consequence of improved technical characteristics of textbooks there was a large increase in high-quality photos. As for content, separate analysis of the international history of sport and national history of sport became customary. Considering the topic of this paper, our main research question has been linked to the presentation of sport on a national level, but it has to be noted that the portrayal of sport on global level has been connected with politics too. In general, it was reduced to the short history of the Olympics with a strong focus on the connection with politics, and often referring to the 1936 Olympics in Berlin and Jesse Owens. Regarding the portrayal of sport on a national level, it is important to recall that in Croatia, practically the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by the conflict between the Croatian and Yugoslav national ideology.

Accordingly, in the context of the third phase of Croatian modernization (after 1991) the new historical narrative was formed, which also influenced the representation of the history of Croatian sport in textbooks. Therefore, in the interpretation of the development of sport during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1941), it was often emphasized that the Croatian sports associations were precursors of the Yugoslav ones, which were later transferred from Zagreb to Belgrade. Thus, the importance of the Croatian sports tradition and the nation as a whole is emphasized in comparison to the other nations of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia. At the same time, a certain victim myth was created out of Croatian sport in that period. In modern history textbooks, sport in the Independent State of Croatia, due to the trauma and many controversies linked to this period of national history, is rarely mentioned. Similarly, there is no mention of sport activities among partisans, so Hajduk's political action during the war has been ignored too. Accordingly, the period of socialist Yugoslavia, despite the increasing social importance of sport in everyday life during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has been largely avoided. As a rule, only the big international competitions which were held in Croatia (1979 Mediterranean Games in Split; 1987 Universiade in Zagreb) have been mentioned. Pictures – that have special



symbolical meaning in education in general – from this period are rare as well. Regarding the athletes, typically representatives of individual sports are portrayed or mentioned (Đurđica Bjedov, Mate Parlov and Matija Ljubek). As has already been said, professional clubs have been of secondary importance for the Croatian national identity (re)construction process, so there is usually no mention of them. National team successes from the socialist period have usually been ignored as well, including the prominent Croatian athletes within them. In rare cases they are singled out from the rest of the team and represented as the most important individuals for the success of national teams, like it is the case in the textbook written by Matković and Mirošević (2007: 287) for example: “Croatian athletes led in achieving top results in ex-Yugoslavia as well...”.



Picture 2. Croatian athletes from the period of socialist Yugoslavia in the contemporary Croatian textbooks: Coxed four team of Gusar Split, Đurđa Bjedov, Mate Parlov and Matija Ljubek (Matković and Mirošević 2007: 287).



Ultimately, all this results in certain discrepancies, as far more space has been dedicated to the development of sport in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century than the second; at the same time, the level and number of sports events has a late 20<sup>th</sup>-century bias. This is clearly evident in the analysis of the history textbooks published after 2000 and in the interpretation of the portrayal of athletes from more recent Croatian history (after 1991). The number of their photos is far greater in relation to those from previous eras. They are usually depicted in the Croatian national team jerseys, often during the intonation of the national anthem with their hands on their hearts, or celebrating some major achievement while holding a Croatian symbol (flags, coat of arms, emblems etc.). Regarding the national teams, they are usually present in photographs of men's football or handball team (See: Brkljačić et al. 2000; Matković 2000; Đurić 2000; Jurčević and Rajić 2004; Bekavac and al. 2007; Bekavac and Jareb 2008: 233; Akmadža et al. 2009).



Picture 3. Croatian handball team Olympic (2004) and world champions (2001) (Bekavac and Jareb 2008: 233).



Picture 4. Croatian football team celebrating the bronze medal at the 1998 FIFA World Cup (Bekavac and Jareb 2008: 233).



The most prominent athletes in Croatian history textbooks are basketball player Dražen Petrović, tennis player Goran Ivanišević and skiers Janica and Ivica Kostelić – which leads us to conclude that they represent national icons. Again, national symbols are practically always clearly visible, whether in the form of national jerseys or the Croatian flag and coat of arms. In short, the history textbooks connect the nation-state symbols and the current set of norms and values with events linked with happiness and success. Sports victories are represented as national victories. Not only do the athletes represent themselves, their local or regional community or a social group, but the entire nation as well (Kolstoe 2006: 37-38).



Picture 5. Dražen Petrović, “one of the most famous and successful Croatian athletes of all time” (Kolar-Dimitrijević, Petrić and Raguž 2007: 182).

The accompanying texts spread the same message, because athletes have been represented as promoters of national glory around the world, i.e. national ambassadors. At the same time they provide a norm of conduct to be followed, becoming role models in the process. To illustrate the above claims we shall cite some textbooks below:

Croatian athletes in individual and team sports enjoy a good reputation in the world [...]. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Croatian swimmers, water-polo and table tennis players are at the top of the world's sport [...]. It should be noted that the names of Croatian female athletes are uttered with equal respect [...] (Đurić 2000: 161).

One can say that no aspect of social life did more for Croatia, produced as much publicity for Croatia as sport did [...] Janica and Ivica Kostelić have, under the watchful eye of their father Ante, accomplished a world-wide success that will not be surpassed for a long time [...] (Bekavac and Jareb 2008: 232-233).



Goran Ivanišević, one of the most successful tennis players in the world; during the armed aggression against the Republic of Croatia, he was the most prominent international promoter of his invaded homeland [...]. Among numerous international athletes and sporting achievements, talented Croats have achieved extraordinary successes in both individual and team sports – successes far greater than the investment Croatia has been making in sport [...]. The best Croatian basketball players – Dražen Petrović and Dino Rađa – were among the most prominent promoters of sovereign Croatia all around the world [...]. However, the biggest Croatian and global sport's phenomenon is certainly family Kostelić (Janica and Ivica and their father and trainer Ante). By winning three gold and one silver medal at the 2002 Olympic games, Janica Kostelić has surpassed all former Olympic achievements [...] (Jurčević and Raić 2004: 151-152).

This ticket for the first international match of the Croatian football team is the evidence of Croatian athletes' desire for the independence of Croatian sport [...] (text accompanying the photo of the ticket for the match between Croatia and the USA. On the ticket were depicted the monument of Ban Jelačić and the Croatian coat of arms) (Bekavac and Jareb 2008: 233).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the conducted research and the interpretation of the representation of sports in history textbooks in the context of the theory of modernization of Croatian society, and considering the theoretical knowledge about the relationship between sports and politics in the process of (re)constructing national identity, we can conclude that we have confirmed the initial thesis on the role of sport in history education. However, it should be emphasized that sport still represents relatively small part of the teaching material and curriculum in Croatia – a fact that can be attributed primarily to the traditional approach of the Croatian education system and the reluctance of history textbook authors to include such topics to a greater extent. The use of sport in history textbooks begins only in 1972, while the amount of text dedicated to the history of sport starts to grow markedly only in the third phase of the modernization of Croatian society, after 1991. Therefore, we think it would be extremely useful to conduct similar research in other European nation-states and compare the results. This would provide better insight about the increasing importance of sport in modern society, as well as about the process of modernization itself. Interpretation of the portrayal of sport in different periods and social systems confirmed the thesis about the role of sport as an auto-representative mechanism, which contributes to national (re)construction in line with Anderson's notion of imagined community.

As was shown, almost exclusively national athletes were portrayed in the textbooks in order to "invent a tradition", which is again in accordance with the Hobsbawm's theory. They usually appear together with clearly visible national



symbols, which characterizes all international sports events and further contributes to the nation (re)construction process according to Billig. This is also one of the reasons why the content analysis of Croatian history textbooks shows that professional sports clubs have been less important than national teams or individual athletes for the process of the nation (re)construction. The most represented athletes in the Croatian history textbooks are those from the most recent history, i.e. those from the period of the Republic of Croatia. The Yugoslav period has been somewhat neglected, which again serves to confirm the current set of norms and values, as well as the social and political system.

Thus, the most prominent athletes become national icons (Petrović, Ivanišević, Janica and Ivica Kostelić etc.), who are equated with the most important individuals from the national history. Their photos in the national jerseys, with clearly visible national symbols, connect them with the nation as a whole (Giullianotti 2005). The fact that their individual or team success is presented as “ours” has been particularly emphasized in Croatia, due to the important role that athletes played in the 1990s. However, at the same time it shows obliviousness of the past sporting successes simply because previous generations of Croatian athletes represented another country. Again, this confirms the strong connection between sport and the process of modernization, with sport becoming a more and more important mechanism in the process of nation (re)construction.

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