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The Pregnant-Moment Photograph: The 1908 London Marathon and the Cross-Media Evaluation of Sport Performances

Markus Stauff[*]

Abstract: *»Der fruchtbare Moment in der Fotografie: Der olympische Marathon 1908 und die crossmediale Evaluation von sportlicher Leistung«*. This article uses a famous photograph from the 1908 London Olympics to reflect on the broader relationship between competitive sports and photography, and especially to rethink the role of the so-called "pregnant moment." While sports reliably offer dramatic situations which can be used to highlight photography's potential to freeze movement and condense meaning in one image, photography offers sports a way to communicate the spectacle of moving bodies and outstanding performances. Yet sports photography is always entangled in cross-media practices that support and complicate the referentiality of the image in order to evaluate the athletic performance and its aesthetic experience. Adding to the broader discussion on photographic evidence, this article claims that, already starting in the early 20th century, sport contributed to a visual culture in which referentiality is unfolded in series of representations across different media. The pregnant-moment photograph, rather than condensing a competition in a single image, can more appropriately be conceived of as one instalment of such a cross-media series.

Keywords: Photography, pregnant moment, referentiality, media sport, Olympics.

A by now canonical photograph from the Olympic Marathon in 1908 shows the Italian Dorando Pietri crossing the finish line supported by two race officials. He got disqualified because of the support he repeatedly received while running – or rather stumbling and straying – the last 300 meters inside the stadium. For some years, people claimed that one of the people supporting the athlete was Arthur Conan Doyle, a claim which has been clearly refuted by now. The famous author was, however, sitting on the bleachers close to the finish line, writing a report for the Daily Mail (Lovesey 2001): "The Italian's great performance can never be effaced from our records of sport, be the decision of the judges what it may" (Daily Mail, July 25, 1908). David Davis, who has written a detailed account of the event, including a history of its major protagonists, claims that the photograph was essential to the historical weight the event

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would assume: "The haunting black-and-white image gave the public immediate visual corroboration of the race that everybody was talking about" (Davis 2012). But what exactly did this image corroborate and how?

In the following, I will use this photograph as a starting point to discuss how sports photography, while often condensing a competition into one spectacular image of a decisive moment, is nevertheless best analysed as part of an ongoing cross-media practice of understanding and evaluating athletic performances and their aesthetic or moral qualities. On the one hand, the 1908 photograph depicts a "decisive" or "pregnant" moment, covering exactly the moment in which the athlete crosses the finish line and additionally offering visual proof of the reason for his disqualification. On the other hand, a lot of additional information is needed to actually see what is happening here, and in 1908 this image actually was but one element in an avalanche of media forms giving complementary accounts of the competition.

This might sound banal, since by now it seems commonsensical that images (and their evidence) are embedded in contexts and practices which shape how they are looked at and what they render visible (e.g. Tagg 1981; Van Dijck 2005; Siegel 2014). Yet, adding to the broader discussion on photographic evidence, I want to argue that sport's visual culture (and especially pregnant-moment photographs) offers an especially fertile, yet so far largely neglected field that has particular procedures for creating and negotiating visual referentiality. While photographs (and other visual forms) have received increasing attention in sport history over the past years, that research often focuses on the historically changing meaning and use value of images, or their broader social and cultural significance (e.g. Borish and Phillips 2012; Buysse and Embser-Herbert 2004; Fagg 2011; Huggins and O'Mahony 2011; Kinsey 2011; O'Mahoney 2006; Osmond 2008, 2010). The contribution of photography to the understanding and evaluation of performances is rarely discussed, or if it is then mainly with respect to the late 19th-century experiments in the photographic analysis of body movements which culminated in Étienne-Jules Marey's analysis of athletes during the 1900 Olympics (Braun 1995 esp. chapter 5; cf. also Frizot 2003; Gunning 2002; Herrmann 1996).

Modern competitive sport reliably produces outstanding and spectacular events, fostering chances for pregnant-moment photographs that can quickly receive "iconic" status. Yet from the late 19th century onwards, sporting events are scheduled, serialized, rule-bound, and scrutinized (and marvelled at) across different media and with the support of heterogeneous representational forms. Much more than other "spectacles" such as political events or catastrophes, the sports photograph, I want to claim, is entangled in cross-media practices that support and complicate the referentiality of the image in order to evaluate the athletic performance and its aesthetic experience.

After specifying the concept of the pregnant-moment photograph I will focus on the image from the marathon at the 1908 Olympic Games in London to

analyse how the meaning of an individual photograph depends on a cross-media context. Starting from the captions of the image, I will follow its entanglements with the avalanche of media representations that framed the event and the modes of its perception. Finally, I will argue that sport, by harnessing visual media to make its performances visible and accountable, contributes to a visual culture in which referentiality is unfolded in series of representations across different media. The pregnant-moment photograph, rather than condensing a competition in one image, can more appropriately be conceived of as one instalment of such a series.

1. Two Types of "Pregnant-Moment" Photography

Capturing the dynamic, heterogeneous, and surprising movements of bodies (and objects like bats and balls) in sports challenges and highlights photography's eerie potential to freeze time and present an image of the instantaneous. When art historian E.H. Gombrich discussed the depiction of movement in art in the 1960s, he accredited "pictures of football matches and athletic events" with familiarizing us with the "chaotic configurations" resulting from instantaneous photographs (1964, 296). Though the capability to push the button at the 'decisive' or 'pregnant' moment contributed much to photography's self-understanding and its cultural reputation more generally (Peters 2010; Stiegler 2005), it found its most fertile field in sports photography. In countless historical overviews and memoirs, the intuition for the right moment resulting in the visual disclosure of authentic emotions or essential actions is described as the epitome of sports photography as a genre (e.g. Barnes 2000; Brandstätter 1980; Lattes 1977).

In sports photography, however, it also becomes clearer than in other fields that there are at least two different types of pregnant-moment photography. There is what one could call the *pregnant moment of photography* which is mainly defined by the formal features of the image and which tends to disconnect the visual from the actual competition, and there is the *pregnant moment of sports*, which results from capturing a significant situation of a competition and thereby highlights the referential aspect of the photograph. The two types are not exclusive, but they describe two different dynamics of sports photography.

The *pregnant moment of photography* mainly consists of the surprising configurations that result from freezing highly dynamic movements into a still image. Bodies seemingly levitating in the air are one of the most persistent motifs in sports photography (Hediger and Stauff 2008; Moore and Lenman 2005), as the leaps and jumps underline the potential of photography just as much as they do the ephemerality of the moment. Additionally, facial expressions, body postures, or material details (splashing sweat or sand, dented balls, etc.) are turned into aesthetic features of sports that heretofore had been invisible.

The moment of the photograph is 'pregnant' because it discloses an accidental and arbitrary configuration of elements (bodies, limbs, etc.) which would have been non-existent without the freezing and which no one could have planned.

In the beginning, instantaneous photography was actually often criticized for these twisted and grotesque postures (Gunning 2002). Sometimes, though, the frozen moment transforms the moving body into a statue which caters to traditional notions of beauty (Werneburg 1996, 6-7) or which becomes a conventionalized depiction of the body that characterizes different sports – the tennis player stretching for the serve, the high jumper just above the bar, and so on (Walther 2007, 86-98). In all these cases, the pregnant moment does not depend on the actual course and outcome of the competition, but rather on photography's potential to transform dynamic movement into formal concision or remarkability. In contrast to street and fashion photography, which also falls in love with leaping bodies in the 1930s (Schmidt 2009, 70-82), the actual circulation of sports photography nevertheless loads the images with referentiality: they are published in relation to a particular event; the athletes are often identified through jersey colours and number; and the captions either specify the photo as a particular moment of the game or add a more allegorical or metaphorical meaning, condensing the course of the entire competition.

Such referential qualities are much more relevant in the *pregnant moments of sports*-type of photographs, which get their significance from the athletic competition by visualizing (and thus "corroborating") one of its decisive moments – an astounding performance, a turning point, or the reasons behind a success or a defeat. While it might still offer a surprising or pleasing visual configuration of elements, the narrative order of things becomes paramount: Why and how did something happen? In the late 18th century, G.E. Lessing, discussing the differences between temporal art forms (poetry) and spatial ones (painting), determined this as the most appropriate way for (non-moving) images to represent movement: They have to depict the "pregnant moment" (Lessing 2013, 92), that is, the moment in an ongoing action that says the most about what happened before and after.

The famous photograph from the 1908 London marathon is an interesting example of this second type of pregnant-moment photography. It is less praised and remembered for its surprising formal achievement than for recording an essential moment in the stadium that made this event itself (and not the picture) exciting and memorable. The image therefore is also a good starting point to analyse how such pregnant-moment photographs actually achieve meaning and uphold referentiality.

2. Complicating Referentiality

When the marathon photograph was reprinted on the front page of a Dutch sports and leisure magazine less than two weeks after the event [Figure 1], the caption read: "Arrival of the Italian Dorando, who passed the finish line first but got disqualified because he needed support, which is easily visible in our photograph" (De Revue der Sporten, no. 6, August 6, 1908, my translation).[1]

Figure 1: The Pregnant Moment and Its Evidence

2e Jaargang. No. 6. 6 Augustus 1908.

DE REVUE DER SPORTEN

Geïll. Veertiendaagsch Tijdschrift Direct. Redact. Leo Lauer

Prijs f 5.50 per jaar (extra nummers inbegrepen). Franco per post f 6.— Afzonderlijke nummers f 0.25.
Advertentiën 20 ct. per regel.

De Marathon-race bij de Olympische Spelen te Londen.

Source: De Revue der Sporten, no. 6, August 6, 1908.

Unsurprisingly, an image's capability to corroborate facts – and its identification of the pregnant moment itself – depends on the context and especially the captions accompanying its publication and circulation. In mass media, and especially in journalism, nearly all photographs come with paratexts which specify their potentially polysemic meaning or extend the depicted action to invisible aspects of the topic at hand (Keilbach 2013, 441).

[1] "Aankomst van den Italiaan Dorando, die 't eerst de eindstreep passeerde, doch gedisqualificeerd werd wegens geboden hulp, hetgeen op onze foto goed te zien is."

It remains conspicuous, though, that the evidence of the photograph itself gets highlighted in the caption: "which is easily visible in our photograph." The image is supposed to show – and possibly be proof of – something very specific that happened in front of the camera. The historical role of photography in understanding and analysing movements (of animals and of athletes in particular [e.g. Muybridge 1907, 1985]) contributes just as much to this conviction as sports' clear rules and regulations, fostering a strongly framed, often binary reading of the image: Did he get support or not?

Simultaneously, however, the referentiality of the image gets complicated: it shows something that has truly happened (and is in fact visible), but it does not display the true result of the competition. It shows someone crossing the finish line first, yet not being the winner of the race. It shows the reason for disqualification, but neither the act of disqualification nor the result of the race.

With this ambivalence – showing a "pregnant moment," yet being unable to display the final outcome – the photograph could be taken as a clear example of a recurrent type of journalistic photographs, those of "impending action," which Barbie Zelizer has argued are regularly used in journalism to deal with unsettled and contested events and to memorialize them (2010). Zelizer's main interest lies in photographs showing people "about to die" (interestingly, two of her early examples are from 1906 and 1910, thus close to the 1908 marathon). Such photographs open a field of interpretation and cultural negotiation – which is clearly also the case with the photograph from the marathon. However, sports photographs depicting a "pregnant moment" generally are about a very specific rule-defined event. Since all kinds of events only achieve visibility (and evidence) in photography if "the event itself has been named and characterized" (Sontag 2005, 14), it is important to understand the particular forms and practices which identify and negotiate events in sports.

On the one hand, sports reliably and continuously produce pregnant moments and get surrounded by media constellations that are set up to capture them wherever and whenever they happen. On the other hand, sports' pregnant moments are layered and contested because their evidence depends on a framework of rules and regulations, athletic tactics, and broader narratives about capabilities, expectations, and partisanship. Therefore, the referentiality of the photo ("easily visible in our photograph") is not only supported by the specific rules and the visibility of sports, but also through a cross-media discourse that discusses possible outcomes in advance and scrutinizes its many different aspects in hindsight.

The marathon photograph here is used to discuss the extent to which the referentiality of images in sports is based on the necessity to read and to contextualize, to know the rules of sports as well as the rules and limits of photographic evidence. While seemingly referring to a very specific and well-defined event (an identifiable athlete, a particular moment of a competition), the depiction of

this pregnant moment ropes sports photography into a cross-media dynamic that complicates what is to be seen.

3. The Cross-Media Evaluation of Performance

Due to the basic seriality and rule-boundedness of modern competitive sport, its depictions cannot be separated from the cross-media discourse that prepares the event, outlines possible outcomes, establishes the required knowledge to evaluate the event, and pre-mediates its aesthetic potential. Without reducing the impact of photographs to textual meaning, the consideration of this context allows for a better understanding of the mode of perception that characterizes sports' visual culture and the role of pregnant-moment photographs.

On July22, 1908, two days ahead of the event, the London *Times* documented the eleven rules of the upcoming marathon race. On the same page, it published the names of the participants (the first and last name of Dorando Pietri got mixed up in most publications at the time), a distance table listing relevant landmarks along with the estimated arriving times for some of these places, and a turn-by-turn description of the route, sketching the actual experience of running the race for the readers:

> After passing under the Great Western Railway lines, turn sharp to the left across Old Oak-common and Wormwood-scrubs, keeping the footpath between the prison and Hammersmith infirmary into Cucane-road for Exhibition Grounds where a special entrance will be made and a course roped for competitors to QQ, RR, SS entrance to the Stadium. (*The Times*, July 22, 1908, 11)

On the day of the race, July 24, *The Times* published an expanded version of the same information, now complemented by a comprehensive narrative of prior Olympic marathon races, a map of the precise course, a discussion of the favourites (without mentioning Pietri), and more general speculation on the performances that could be expected: "in all probability the winner and several of the others will have run those 26 miles considerably faster than a similar distance has ever yet been run in the history of the world" (p. 9). This was followed by a detailed outline of the athletic challenges, but also of the aesthetic pleasures of the route (considerations about Olympic marathon routes also appear in Gajek 2018, in this issue). Some stretches are described as "rather uninteresting" or as "beautiful," others are scrutinized in more technical detail:

> But it is here, five miles from home, where the tramlines begin, that the runners will meet with the severest test of their endurance. Because of their inelasticity, wood blocks are particularly trying to the feet, and the glitter on the polished surface of the road, if the sun happens to be shining, will be apt to make a man who has travelled over 20 miles at top speed turn more than a little dizzy just when he has to draw upon his last reserves of strength and determination. It is quite possible that some of the leaders may break down here, when they are almost within sight of home. (*The Times*, July 24, 1908, 9)

The public is thus equipped with the necessary resources to understand the form and the challenges of the competition and the many factors feeding into its unpredictable outcome. This is more than just a context that would specify or extend the meaning of the photograph, establishing a mode of perception that uses the variety of the involved media forms (maps, tables, narratives, metaphors, descriptions, etc.) to open a field not only of possible events but also of possible explanations and interpretations thereof. The rules of the discipline, the qualities of athletes, the effects of different circumstances or weather conditions on the body of athletes – all are invoked as possible aspects of the competition and embellished by more speculative (and enticing) inklings at the possibility of dramatic and last-minute turns of events.

As soon as a competition ends, this field of possible explanations is readjusted with respect to the actual course of events. On the day after the race, *The Times* reprinted the route map next to a detailed account of the race's development. It starts with a short and sober summary of the result:

> J.J. Hayes (U.S.A.) was awarded first place in the Marathon Race yesterday. Dorando (Italy) struggled home first, but a protest was raised against him for being assisted round the track in the Stadium, and he was disqualified. (*The Times*, July 25, 1908, 8)

Yet the report quickly switches into a more dramatic tone, consistently underlining not only the historical dimension of the events, but also their visual qualities and their impact on spectators:

> Dorando gave a most wonderful *exhibition* of pluck and endurance […] the *scene* along the course of the Marathon route yesterday was one that will not easily be forgotten by those who were privileged to follow the race […]. It did not seem right that thousands of people should *witness* a man suffering as he did. (ibid., my italics)

Across the Atlantic, *The New York Times* quite similarly combined awe of the event's historical significance with ambivalence as to the spectacle's moral quality. At the start of the front-page article, the event's uniqueness is praised through a historical comparison typical for sports:

> It would be no exaggeration in the minds of any of the 100,000 spectators who witnessed the finishing struggle of the Marathon race, […] to say that it was the most thrilling athletic event that has occurrend [sic] since that Marathon race in ancient Greece, where the victor fell at the goal and, with a wave of triumph, died. […] It was a spectacle the like of which none living had ever seen, and none who saw it expect ever to see it repeated. (*The New York Times*, July 25, 1908, 1)

A bit further down though, after detailing the suffering of Pietri and the triumph of the U.S. athlete, the same article raised doubts as to whether such a spectacle is something the audience actually wants to witness:

> It is a question whether public opinion will ever support another Marathon race here. Dorando's condition when he finished and the condition of many of

> the contestants in to-day's events, lead people to think it is worse than prize-fighting or bullfighting. (*The New York Times*, July 25, 1908, 2)

The Austrian *Illustrierte Kronen-Zeitung* showed a similar ambivalence, underlining the visual spectacle with a drawing displaying Pietri still running on the course being served refreshments and already looking exhausted (*Illustrierte Kronen-Zeitung*, August 1, 1908, 10). Under the headline "*Mehr Mord als Sport*" (more murder than sports), the accompanying text vividly described the athlete's suffering and underlined the drawing's visual power while simultaneously criticizing the spectacle: "Today, we also use an image, to display the miserable condition in which the runner […] arrived in the stadium. Even circles well-disposed towards sports cannot avoid to disapprove of this drama" (ibid., 9).[2] Considering its non-photographic technique, this illustration produces referentiality in a different (and possibly 'weaker') manner than the famous photograph, and it aims much less at condensing a pregnant moment. Nevertheless, it participates just as much in the cross-media efforts directing attention to relevant aspects of the event to enable its appreciation and evaluation.

Even at a time when pictures of sports were less ubiquitous than today, competitive sport was an emphatically visual practice: the competition was organized for spectators and produced a huge variety of unexpected, dramatic, and complex sights and uncommon forms of perception (for the audience and for the athletes). Even the written descriptions of the competition conceived of it as a series of displays, of 'scenes' or 'exhibits.'

Media representations of sports provide both detailed and multi-perspective accounts of competitions, with all their possible causes and consequences, and vivid accounts of the many ways (which media representations replenish and modulate) in which the competition can be experienced and perceived. This combination of factual account and aesthetic experience, of immediate witnessing and mediated scrutiny, is entangled with practices of ongoing evaluation and judgment: On the one hand, the moral value of the event and its impact on spectators gets discussed; on the other hand, the endeavour to make a competition and its outcome comprehensible provokes a more factual scrutiny of all the visible aspects: What are the difficulties, the challenges, the secret tactics, the unexpected factors? What is a historical achievement and why? Which performance adheres to the rules, and which performance breaks the rules but can nevertheless be appreciated?

> The admiration and sympathy of every person in the Stadium went out to the gallant Italian, who, although he did not win, deserved to win and did more within the limit of his powers than any other man who ran. The crisis in a bat-

[2] "Heute lassen wir auch im Bilde den jämmerlichen Zustand sehen, in welchem der Läufer […] im Stadion anlangte. Auch sportsfreundliche Kreise können nicht umhin, sich über dieses Schauspiel missbilligend auszulassen."

> tle on which the life of a nation hung could hardly have been more impressive than Dorando's entrance into the Stadium. (*New York Times*, July 25, 1908, 2)

Each individual photograph of a competition gets embedded into a series of visual and textual perspectives complementing (and sometimes competing with) each other in the broader endeavour to give an account of a complex event and evaluate its emotional, aesthetic, and factual aspects. Though pregnant-moment photographs might have a better chance of circulating independently, they nevertheless emerge from, and make sense in connection to, such cross-media evaluations of performances and their appropriate perception.

According to Zelizer, pictures of "impending action" receive their cultural impact mostly because the as yet unfinished action opens an "as if" space (2010, 15). They get re-used in different contexts to negotiate the meaning of events that are not yet settled; they are "facilitators of conversation" (Zelizer 2010, 64), soliciting discussions about the before and after of the depicted moment, and about what could have happened differently. In the case of the marathon, ongoing discussions about whether Pietri also could have finished the race without help (which he himself claimed) or whether his performance, the disqualification notwithstanding, was more remarkable than the one of the winner are proof of this "as if," which "forces an event's meaning through the display of images that are themselves contingent" (Zelizer 2010, 15).

Compared to the journalistic use of "as if" images more generally, however, the visual culture of sports intensifies the tension between the specific referentiality of the individual image and the ongoing practices of evaluation and speculation. It frames the changing use values of photographs which, interwoven with other representational forms, gravitate back from the as if to the "as *is*" function connecting the image to what actually happened (Zelizer 2010, 15-6). Additionally, the ongoing discussion and clarification of the referentiality of the image is combined with an explicit appreciation of the different sights and experiences produced by the event and its mediatizations.

To say that the "image gave the public immediate visual corroboration of the race that everybody was talking about" (Davis 2012) means decontextualizing the photograph from this contemporary context. The representational forms across different media, first announcing and framing the event, and later reporting on its actual course, result, and aftermath, create a mode of perception looking for corroboration. While the photograph very much contributed to the memory of the 1908 marathon as a historical event, it was the avalanche of narratives, lists, maps, witnesses, descriptions, and evaluations which allowed the photograph to become a historical record – eventually condensing knowledge and experience into one image.

4. The Serialized Image

The torrent of information on rules and participants, descriptions of challenges and possible outcomes, as well as reports and interpretations of the course and final result of the event all specify and anchor the image, defining what it is about and what spectators pay attention to. At the same time, they also open it up for ongoing interpretation and re-appropriation (Barthes 1977).

The captions of sports photographs – but also their wider context – integrate the two distinct functions of text in relation to images as described by Roland Barthes. Often, captions and contexts work as "anchorage" – they help "to choose *the correct level of perception"* and to selectively elucidate the image by controlling the identification and interpretation of its signifiers (Barthes 1977, 39). Mentioning the fact that Pietri gets support in the photograph is an example of that, as is the highlighting of how the drawing displays his "miserable condition." Simultaneously, though, captions and context function as what Barthes called "relay": they are complementary, transforming the photograph and the text into pieces of the much more extensive unity of a story or other world-building practices. Their interplay "advance[s] the action by setting out, in the sequence of messages, meanings that are not to be found in the image itself" (Barthes 1977, 41). This is not only the case when the photograph of Pietri gets connected to the course and actual outcome of this particular race, including his disqualification, but also when it is connected to the history of the marathon and to wider reflections on human endeavour and suffering. The urge to understand and explain the performance of athletes leads to a particular intense mix of both these functions. The "content" of the image is highlighted, specified, and scrutinized while also being embedded into the narrative world of a competition and the rule-bound world of a discipline.

The constant back and forth between these two functions in sport's visual culture directs attention towards the visual quality of the image and its referentiality. Of course, sports produce an abundance of mythical images in which the specific reference of the image is mainly a vessel for a more general connotative or ideological meaning (Barthes 1972, in which he discusses wrestling and the Tour de France). Instead of one image, anchored or extended by captions, however, the serial intertwining of images and other media representations has become the dominant visual form of sports. Not only is the individual competition, as already mentioned, part of a serial organization of competitions (or actually a number of overlapping series: the series of the Olympic Games, the series of marathons, the series of contests between two or three main rivals, etc.), but each individual competition is also reported on in a serialized manner. Additionally, as I will discuss in the remainder of this article, pregnant-moment photographs are often split up into series of photographs.

The French magazine *La Vie au Grand Air* reported on the 1908 Olympic Games in two consecutive issues, both including a double-page spread with a

collage of photographs depicting different events. In the issue from August 1, 1908, a cut-out frontal image of a long jumper, as if jumping out of the page towards the reader, is inserted over a background of eight photographs (Figure 2). Four of them show different moments of the London marathon: The start at Windsor castle, Pietri fallen to the ground and surrounded by officials in the stadium, Pietri crossing the finish line while being supported, and Hayes, the eventual winner, arriving at the finish. The "pregnant moment" of Pietri getting support becomes one image in a series of distinctive but closely interrelated happenings. The photographs are ordered chronologically from left to right, yet the captions at the bottom of the page (referencing the images through numbers) are not. Additionally, other images (e.g. a small cut out of the winner of the 5000m race) interfere with the clear narrative order. As the page offers both a collection of interesting sights and a story, it takes some work on the reader's side – and additional knowledge – to piece the elements together.

Figure 2: The Multiplication of Images

Source: La Vie au Grand Air, August 1, 1908, 88-9.

For the second image from the marathon, the caption read: "First in the stadium, the Italian Dorando fell, exhausted, onto the track during the course of the marathon race." And for the fourth: "The American Hayes, having arrived second in the marathon, 39 seconds behind Dorando, benefits from the disqualification of the Italian and gets ranked first."[3] The accompanying texts thus

[3] "L'Italien Dorando, arrivé premier au Stade, dans la course de Marathon, tombe, exténué, sur la piste." "L'Americain Hayes, arrivé deuxième dans le Marathon, à 39 secondes, derrière Dorando, profite de la disqualification de l'Italien et est classé premier" (*La Vie au Grand Air, August 1, 1908, 88-9).*

anchor and specify the referentiality of the photographs while also *relaying* their meaning to the other images and to other, non-visible elements of the story. It is characteristic of sports that rules, numbers, and facts (aside from narrative cause-effect relationships) are also connected to the image. The pregnant-moment photograph that partly dominates memory culture through processes of selection, condensation, and canonization later on is actually part of a series of images, some of which present other pregnant moments (and therefore other possible ways to condense and memorize the events) or seemingly non-descript photos that are paramount for the aesthetic and referential evaluation of the pregnant moment.

In *Sportscape*, a coffee-table book claiming to present the "best of sports photography from the last 100 years," selected according to the dual logic of "photographic merit and historic interest" (Wombell and Barnes 2000, dust-jacket), the 1908 marathon gets represented through a series of ten images. Four show the empty course, two depict Pietri running on the course; the two next pictures are most central, each covering a double-page spread: Pietri crossing the finish line and him being carried away on a stretcher. The final two pages show Hayes approaching the finish line, and him being carried by other members of the US team for a victory lap (Wombell and Barnes 2000, 62-72).
The photo of Hayes on the race track shows the official from the Pietri photo running next to him with a huge megaphone; since his hand, stretched out to his left, is covered by Hayes's arm, it is actually not entirely clear from the image that he does not provide support to Hayes. Yet the case is obviously no longer considered contested, and there is no explicit reading of the images that would try to use them as proof. The captions are fairly sober: "An official runs alongside John Hayes as he comes in second"(Wombell and Barnes 2000, 71). As part of a series, this image becomes a straightforward illustration of a fact, proving again that visible evidence is dependent on its consistency "with other things that we accept as knowledge within the framework of the relevant discourse" (Mitchell 1992, 43). The tension between the individual photo and the series, between the task of giving an account of the race and marveling at the resulting visuals remains center stage – not least through the narrative order of the photographs, their heterogeneous styles, and the captions which switch back and forth between event summary and praise of the photographs' relevance.

Maybe most remarkably, the three images of Pietri crossing the finish line in the three different publications discussed so far are all different. Shot within a second or two and from slightly different angles, they all show Pietri just before or (in *Sportscape*) just after touching the rope. While the accompanying text claims that the "photograph of Pietri crossing the finish line is perhaps the first image of a sporting event to achieve the status of great sports photography" (Wombell and Barnes 2000, 62), there are actually several photos circu-

lating.[4] Already in 1908, there was enough media attention for sports events to spawn a number of similar photos of one decisive moment.

If photographers to a certain extent are programmed by the logic of the apparatuses they use (Flusser 2000, 68), in sports they are additionally programmed by the spatial and temporal structure of the competition. While aesthetic criteria (like Lessing's) could be used to discuss which of the resulting photos offers the most appropriate (the most 'pregnant') depiction, sport's focus on, and delimitation of referentiality, makes them somewhat interchangeable. In the syntagmatic chain of events of the competition (and the respective images), there is also a paradigmatic axis, which makes it possible to choose one of several available options to represent a specific moment. The serialized production of sports photographs (many photographers standing next to each other, all taking several photographs of a predefined moment of a competition), and their serialized distribution and exhibition (becoming part of a series of cross-media representations of different aspects of an event) are the conditions of existence for the pregnant-moment photograph in sports, for its cultural appreciation, and for its many forms of use value.

5. Conclusion

Throughout the interwoven history of modern competitive sport and photography, sport has proven to be a rich field for pregnant-moment photography. Through its serial organization of events, which combine a clear set of spatial and temporal frameworks (e.g. finish lines) with dynamic body movement and surprising outcomes, sport has fostered two specifiable types of such photography, one emerging from the photographic freezing of movement resulting in otherwise invisible, aesthetically pleasing, spectacular or hilarious configurations of bodies, the other resulting from decisive actions and turning points of the competition which are recorded, scrutinized, and memorialized through the still image. These pregnant moments respectively underline sports photography's aesthetic spectacle and its referential urgency. Both often achieve a certain independency from the historical context of the event and circulate into different contexts with specific use value. Yet both are made possible and meaningful through a cross-media sports discourse which entangles the individual image into series of accounts which together foster the evaluation of the performance and the appreciation of its aesthetic experience. The pregnant-moment photograph in sports – and I would argue sports photography more

[4] As the 1908 Olympics were covered by newsreel companies, the scene was also available in moving image form, and "the dramatically cut footage of Italian runner, Dorando Pietri, stumbling into the White City stadium and being helped over the finishing line, proved immensely popular" (Goldblatt 2016, 149).

generally – achieves meaning and use value through its interplay with other representational forms, which support and complicate the referentiality of the images.

The analysis presented here could and should be developed in a more historically contextual manner: The knowledge that enables the scrutiny and understanding of the event (and its pictures) is inseparable from historically specific and politically loaded meanings that stretch far beyond the rules and facts of sport proper. *The Times*, for example, helped the readers to imagine the course of the 1908 marathon race by comparing the shape of the route to that of Africa, thereby taking advantage of and naturalizing colonialist imaginations:

> If the map of the course is turned so that its eastern or finishing point is at the top, it will be seen that the general direction of the race corresponds roughly to the outline of the west coast of Africa. The runners will start from Pietersmaritzburg, which is Windsor; they will turn sharply to the right at Cape Town, or Slough […]. (*The Times*, July 24, 1908, 9)

My claim here is not that sports photography always has to be understood in relation to sport's cross-media discourse on competition, performance, and spectacle. After all, there are very different kinds of images in sport's visual culture and they often get decontextualized. Additionally, like all practices for evaluating performances, those of sports are both highly specialized (like the digital systems for determining line calls) and dependent on unavoidably ambivalent cultural practices. I do want to argue, however, that the quest to understand performances and appreciate their aesthetics very much contributes to both the politics of sports and its broader cultural impact.

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