

Do Significant Achievements of National Football Team Can Strengthen National Identity in Montenegro?

Stevo Popović, and Duško Bjelica

University of Montenegro, Faculty for Sport and Physical Education, Nikšić, Montenegro

ABSTRACT

Although most of Montenegro's population adore football and support national football team, strong ethnic bigotry still exists. It is interesting to compare the results of 1981 and 2011 census. There were 44.98% of ethnic Montenegrins in 2011, 28.73% of Serbs, and 8.65% of Bosnians; while the population living in same area in 1981 numbered 68.54% of ethnic Montenegrins and 3.32% Serbs, while 'Bosnians' did not exist as a category at that time; they were referred to according to their religion, i.e. "Muslims". Obviously, these differences were not caused by some great migrations, as it might seem at first sight, but it is the result of the ideological sentiments of a number of citizens of Montenegro, who changed beliefs during the difficult and turbulent time of the 1990s. The variations of their ethnicities are the outcome of the ideological concepts and their religious affiliations, mostly due to the reason that most of them experienced the collapse of the Yugoslav national identity and still looking for their self. Hence, a main goal of this study is to recommend that significant achievements of national football team can strengthen national identity and enhance peaceful coexistence between various ethnic groups in multi-cultural society such as Montenegro.

Key words: Soccer, Ethnicity, Nationality, Nationalism.

Introduction

The Republic of Montenegro covers an area of 13,812 sq. kilometers and borders Albania, Kosovo (as defined under UNSCR 1244/99), Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and the Adriatic Sea in the south-west of the Balkan Peninsula. According to the 2011 census¹, the population of this area numbered 620,029 inhabitants: 50.61% are women, and 49.39% are men. The main features of the ethnic structure of the population of Montenegro areas follows: 44.98% of the population is ethnic Montenegrins, 28.73% are Serbs, 8.65% are Bosnians, and 4.91% are Albanians, etc. It is interesting to compare the results of the most numerous ethnic groups to the results of the 1981 census. The population living in the same area in 1981 numbered 68.54% of ethnic Montenegrins and 3.32% Serbs, while "Bosnians" did not exist as a category at that time; they were referred to according to their religion, i.e. "Muslims". Obviously, these differences were not caused by some great migrations, as it might seem at first sight. It is the result of the ideological sentiments of a number of citizens of Montenegro, who changed beliefs during the difficult and turbulent time of the 1990s. Thus, it is important for this study to underline that the variations of their ethnicities are the outcome of the ideological concepts and their religious affiliations, mostly due to the reason that most of them experienced the collapse of the Yugoslav national identity. From this reason, it is very important to meet some historical perspectives of the political and demographic controversies in Montenegrin society through last century and half to understand better how to use that significant achievement of national football team to strengthen national identity and enhance peaceful coexistence between various ethnic groups in multi-cultural society such as Montenegro.

Historical perspectives of Montenegrin nation

It is very important to start from the fact that a tradition of independent statehood in the area of what is now modern Montenegro dates back to the 11th Century. Although Montenegro had been a sovereign principality for centuries, the most important moment occurred in 1878, when the Congress of Berlin recognized Montenegro as the 27th independent state in the World. However, the history of Montenegrin independence ended in 1918, when Montenegro unconditionally joined Serbia in a controversial decision of the Podgorica Assembly. Soon afterwards Montenegro became a part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the country that is renamed Yugoslavia soon afterwards. From 1918 to 1941 Montenegro was a part of this union, while it was a part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 1946 to 1992. After the collapse of the named federation, Montenegro was the only republic of former Yugoslavia that preferred to remain part of a joint state with Serbia in the early 1990s. This policy was not only pleaded by the post-communist political leaders, but it also was supported by a majority of Montenegrin citizens who wished to preserve the existing federation, due to the closely association with the idea of Yugoslavia. However, this idea was not viable and Montenegro and Serbia established a Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) to succeed the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1992. While the constitution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia envisaged parity between the state members in federal institutions, the common state was obviously dominated by Serbia, both economically and politically. Hence, led by the reform socialist politician, Milo Đukanović, Montenegro was slowly moving away from the federation and walking toward its independence. On 21 May 2006, the referendum was held and more than 55% of Montenegrin citizens voted for independence. Following its declaration of independence,

Montenegro joined the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe, the Partnership for Peace and a number of other international bodies as a sovereign country. The referendum on independence greatly reduced the divisions in Montenegrin society. The political leadership managed to expand consensus across dividing lines, primarily based on a key strategic goal of European integration, a goal supported by two-thirds of the population. Its European perspective was reaffirmed in June 2006 after the recognition of the country's independence by EU member states. In October 2007, Montenegro signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement and an Interim Agreement on trade and trade-related issues. Montenegro submitted its application for EU membership in December 2008. In December 2010, the European Union granted candidate status to Montenegro and accession negotiations had started in June 2012. Once entry negotiations have taken place, Montenegro has to negotiate on 35 chapters of the acquires, which will create a strategic agenda for years to come. Although Montenegro needs to take few steps to open the European doors, strong ethnic bigotry still exists within Montenegrin society, mostly due to the reason the issues of Montenegrin national identity are highly political in nature. Unfortunately, some opposition parties abused it while the authors believe that the government has unclear concept of nation, nationalism and national identity.

Nationalism: look into the past literature

From this reason, it was a compelling time to look into the national identity issue and its ideological counterpart, nationalism from the past literature. The study of nationalism is highly problematized by the use of various terms by different authors to describe similar or identical concepts. In such way, Kellas² categorizes the study of nationalism into two main paradigms, which he describes as “instinctive” and “contextual”, the former relating to human nature and the latter to specific cultural, historical and economic factors. Further Cronin³ breaks the paradigms into primordialists, statist, political mythologists and modernists. Smith⁴ divides them in relation to perennialism, primordialism, ethno-symbolism and modernism. Each of these paradigms can be broadly categorized as either “ethnic” or “modernist”. According to Hastings⁵, the ethnic and modernist views of nationalism differ mainly as to “the date of commencement” with ethnic nationalists believing nations to have been present since before the late 18th century and modernists seeing nationalism as having commenced in the 18th and 19th centuries. Hence, it is already noted that the strong ethnic bigotry is the result of the ideological sentiments of a number of citizens of Montenegro. The authors have the solution to this issue, to switch a strong ethnic identity to the modernist approach that exists all around the western European countries and wider. They also believe, it would be reasonable to investigate how significant achievement of national football team can strengthen national identity as well as enhance peaceful coexistence between various ethnic groups in multi-cultural society such as Montenegro and bring citizens of Montenegro closer to European citizenship.

National team achievements and national identity

This main hypothesis lies in the fact that sport and national identity have been strongly connected through entire history, mostly due to the reason that an individual sportsman or a

national sport team may represent an entire nation and foster a sense of national pride amongst members of a given nation⁶. Hence, sport is well placed for the development of both national identity and national pride⁷, mostly because there is evidence in the scientific literature that national team success as well as hosting major events in the world of sport such as world and continental cups et cetera, could contribute to increased self-esteem and national pride^{8,9,10}. On the other hand, it is wrong to conclude that all members of a certain society exploit sport to construct their national identity as well as that, all members within a same society would derive pride from associating themselves with sporting success. Hence, it is more than clear that sport is probably just one of numerous factors that may influence national identity and as such, it is important to be explored.

A characteristic of the previous studies pertaining to sport and national identity is its non-empirical nature, and this relationship has been documented mostly from anthropological and sociological positions^{11,12,13}. Serious of novels have emphasized the link between sport and a strong sense of collective identity¹⁴. There have been also many investigations regarding the connection between sport and national identity, but not too many from the position: how significant achievement of national football team or any other national sport team can strengthen national identity as well as enhance peaceful coexistence between various ethnic groups¹⁵, mostly due to the reason that sport scientists have been disinterested in researching this relationship in the past. According to Heere and James¹⁶, the investigation of a connection between national football team or any other national sport team and surrounding societies is still extensively unexplored.

In an era of increased globalization, it is clear that sport and major sporting events provide a site for national identities to be expressed. However, some sports disciplines are more suitable than other disciplines to become medium for the development and expression of national identities. These facts vary from nation to nation¹⁷ and the authors of this study chose football as a sports discipline he would like to explore, mostly due to the reason that football is “most important secondary thing in the world” in the most countries all around the World, as well as due to the reason that national football team is favorite national sport team that people would mostly identify with in the country that investigation is planning to be conducted.

Conclusion

Hence, the potential scientific project would analyze the relationship between sport and national identity within Montenegro, focusing on the significant achievement of national football team and its impact on national identity and improvement of peaceful coexistence between various ethnic groups in Montenegro, all in order to come closer to European citizenship. It examines the complexity of defining a sporting national identity, as well as suggests the opportunity of competing definitions of national identity existing in Montenegro within and across the most favorite sport (football) and its significant achievements in post-2006 Montenegro. Consequently, the authors use this publication to invite all interested parties to join the consortium of the potential project proposal that would critically investigate existing hypotheses surrounding sporting nationalism and national pride in Montenegro, to situate the striking absence of recent research findings within the

literature, and to locate contemporary sporting nationalism in the period after Montenegro formally rehabilitate its independence after almost century.

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S. Popović

University of Montenegro, Faculty for Sport and Physical Education, Nikšić, Montenegro
e-mail: stevop@ac.me

DA LI ZNAČAJNI USPJESI NACIONALNOG FUDBALSKEG TIMA MOGU OJAČATI NACIONALNI IDENTITET U CRNOJ GORI?

SAŽETAK

Iako većina Crnogoraca obožava fudbal i podržava nacionalni fudbalski tim, veoma izražena etnička netrpeljivost i dalje postoji. Kada je ovo pitanje u fokusu pažnje, Interesantno je uporediti rezultate popisa iz 1981. godine i popisa iz 2011. godine. Na popisu 2011. godine etnička struktura stanovništva u Crnoj Gori se ogledala u 44,98% koji su se izjasnili kao etnički Crnogorci, zatim 28,73% kao etnički Srbi, 8,65% kao etnički Bošnjaci, dok su populaciju koja je živjela na području Crne Gore sačinjavale sljedeće etničke grupe, prije svega etnički Crnogorci sa 68,54%, zatim etnički Srbi sa 3,32%, dok „Bošnjaci“ kao etnička grupa nisu postoji u to vrijeme, već je značajan dio populacije iz ove etničke grupe odabrao svoju etničku pripadnost u skladu sa religijom, npr. „Muslimani“. Očigledno je da ove razlike nisu uzrokovane značajnijim migracijama, kako bi se dalo zaključiti na prvi pogled, već su rezultat ideološke naklonosti značajnog broja stanovništva u Crnoj Gori, koji su mijenjali svoja uvjerenja tokom turbulentnog perioda tokom 90-ih. Varijacija njihove etničke pripadnosti predstavlja ishod ideoloških koncepata i religioznih osjećanja, najviše iz razloga što je slom jugoslovenskog nacionalnog identiteta doveo do toga da većina njih još uvijek trača za svojim identitetom. Stoga, cilj ove studije je da preporuča da značajni uspjesi nacionalnog fudbalskog tima mogu ojačati nacionalni identitet i unaprijediti miroljubivu koegzistenciju među različitim etničkim grupama u multikulturalnom društvu kao što je crnogorsko.

Ključne riječi: Fudbal, etnička pripadnost, nacionalnost, nacionalizam.

