

THE 1920 FOOTBALL (SOCCER) TOURNAMENT

by Juan Fauria Garcia

The 1920 Olympic football (soccer) tournament has presented problems for many years. During the recent Barcelona Olympics, many in the media attempted to explain this tournament. Usually they attempted to downgrade the importance of the Spanish silver medal, due to the confusion over the disqualification of Czechoslovakia and the second tournament held to decide second place. As concerns the 1920 Olympic football tournament, Olympic history was fast forgotten by the media at Barcelona.

It is important to remember that, after Czechoslovakia was disqualified in the final match against Belgium, a “new” tournament to decide second place was not implemented. This is because it was already in the regulations to hold a second-place tournament.

The *Programmes général de la VII^{ème} Olympiade* writes on page 87 about the football tournament, “Ce concours aura lieu par élimination, d’après le système Bergvall.” And the rules were stated as follows:

1. Les matches commenceront le samedi 28 août.
2. a. Le samedi 28 août se disputeront sur deux ou trois terrains les matches du premier tour.
 - b. Le dimanche 29 août, se joueront les ¼-finales.
 - c. Le mardi 31 août, se joueront les demi-finales.
 - d. Et le même jour, les vaincus des ¼-finales se rencontreront.
 - e. Le jeudi 2 septembre, la finale pour la première place.
 - f. Le même jour, les deux vainqueurs de l’épreuve “d.”
 - g. Le samedi 4 septembre, le vaincu de la finale rencontre le vainqueur du match “f.”
 - h. Le même jour, le pays battu en demi-finale par le premier, rencontre le club battu au premier tour par le première.
 - i. Enfin, le dimanche 5 septembre, match entre le vainqueur de “g.”, et le vainqueur de “h.” Le vainqueur de ce match sera deuxième et le vaincu troisième.

I hope that the French language can be read by most of you, for I think it is better to maintain the original text. It is very clear that the last match among Spain and The Netherlands was held according to the regulations set out prior to the start of the tournament. What was not expected was the disqualification of the Czechoslovakian team. At this point, note what *L’Action Nationale* writes on 4 September 1920:

L’arbitre, M. Lewis, qui a magistralement arbitré la partie de jeudi, a disqualifié les Tchéco-Slovaques. Ceux-ci ont rédigé une réclamation. Ils ne joueront donc pas contre la Hollande. Il serait d’ailleurs difficile de les produire encore en public.

Furthermore, again note the statements from *L’Action Nationale* on 3 September as concerns the hockey (field) tournament, which is quite clear:

A 4 heures, le pays battu en demi-finales par le premier, rencontre le pays battu au premier tour par le premier. Dimanche 5 septembre: finale pour les seconds et troisième places, entre les vainqueurs des deux matches disputés le samedi. Le vainqueur de ce match sera classé second du tournoi et le vaincu sera classé troisième

The rules and the football tournament development, with some explanations, were published in the pages of *El Mundo Deportivo* with the signature of "Ignacio Galea," the name adopted by the three-time Olympic football player, Pedro Vallana. Galea/Vallana, a journalist at the time of the 1920 Olympics, explains that the Spain-Sweden match was suspended initially because Sweden retired from the tournament, but they returned at the request of the organizing committee. The match was delayed one day (1 September) through the mediation of Baron Pierre de Coubertin. Galea/Vallana also translates the Bergvall system regulations.

One of the most famous sports journalists in Spain at that time was Manuel de Castro, who was a linesman at these Olympic Games as well. In a book he wrote concerning the 1920 Olympic football tournament, he wrote of the Czechoslovakia-France (4-1) match, "With this defeat. France was eliminated because the team which beat them, Czechoslovakia, was eliminated in the final two days later. Thus, our neighbors, the French, were eliminated from the second-place tournament." Perhaps the most difficult point to understand is this: why could France not be an aspirant to the bronze medal, while The Netherlands, Italy, Norway, Sweden, and Spain could play for the silver medal? The Bergvall System was like that.

In connection with Czechoslovakia's disqualification, it is interesting to read the details of their protest:

1. On nous a octroyé un linesman anglais, ce qui est en contradiction avec la circulaire supplémentaire aux règlements du concours par laquelle il a été "fixé" que chaque nation participante a le droit à un des deux linesman. Cette violation des règles une fois définitivement fixées nous a porté un préjudice important au cours de la rencontre susdite, parce que les linesman anglais n'étaient point impartiaux et c'est pourquoi nous réclamons l'annulation du match. Cette réclamation, nous l'avons annoncée immédiatement après le match, à l'arbitre et à M. Seeldrayers.
2. La plupart des décisions de l'arbitre M. Lewis étaient fausses et il était évident qu'il se laissait impressionner par le public contre notre équipe. Aussi tous les deux buts ont été marqués par les Belges seulement, par suite de fausses décisions du juge et nous réclamons une enquête rigoureuse sur ce point-là.
3. Au cours du match, des soldats belges ont été introduits en masse jusqu'à la touche, de sorte qu'ils enveloppaient tout le terrain et par leur conduite provocante et menaçante empêchaient nos équipiers à un jeu tranquille et régulier.

Par suite de l'incident très regrettable à l'issue du match où la foule mêlée des soldats a outragé notre drapeau nationale dans une manière inouïe nous déclarons que nous ne pouvons pas continuer à participer au concours jusqu'à ce qu'une satisfaction solennelle soit faite à notre drapeau en présence de la troupe.

What is evident is that the protest was not allowed and Czechoslovakia was disqualified. But returning to the rules, it seems to me that the Bergvall System was not rightfully carried out.

If you read the rules carefully, a new competition for France was not planned. Why? Manuel de Castro states, “. . . because the team which defeated them [Czechoslovakia], was defeated two days later.” Point “d.” notes that the losers in the quarter-finals [Spain, Sweden, Norway, Italy] will play-off, with two matches deciding which two teams would advance. According to “f.”, these two winners were to play off on 2 September to decide one winner to continue in the second-place tournament, which was in this case, Spain.

In point “g.” is when Czechoslovakia was to have played against Spain, but this did not occur as they had been disqualified. In point “h.” Spain, which lost to Belgium in their first-round match, is to play The Netherlands, which lost to Belgium in the semi-finals.

The match between Spain and Czechoslovakia did not take place. Thus Spain should either have advanced to play the winner of the “Spain”-The Netherlands match, or could possibly have played against France, which could have been considered for a match against Spain after the disqualification of Czechoslovakia. This was not done. Clearly, Spain could not play-off against The Netherlands, and then play against itself if it won. Therefore the Spain-The Netherlands match became the match for the silver medal.

In connection with the “return” of the Swedish team to the tournament, it is interesting to note the writings of *Le Martin* on 1 September 1920, “Comme on sait l’équipe suédoise qui a été éliminée par la Hollande, dimanche dernier, avait d’abord déclaré forfait pour le repêchage en vue de l’attribution des seconde et troisième places.

“Le comité suédois estimait que son équipe avait été battue par suite de quelques erreurs de l’arbitre.

“Cédant aux instances du comité olympique belge et du consul de suède, ils viennent de décider de retirer leur forfait.” Spain then protested through Baron Pierre de Coubertin, and for that reason, Italy played Norway on 31 August, and Spain played Sweden on 1 September.

One major problem remains, concerning the writings of *L’Action Nationale* on 4 September 1920, “Ils ne joueront donc pas contre la Hollande,” meaning “The Czechs will not play against The Netherlands.” Was it because they thought the Czechs would win easily against Spain and then the last event would be Czechoslovakia against The Netherlands?

The remaining match, Egypt vs. Yugoslavia, from my point of view, was not an official part of the tournament. I would then estimate the final standings to be as follows:

		W	L	GF	GA
1.	Belgium	3	0	8	1
2.	Spain	4	1	9	5
3.	The Netherlands	2	2	9	10
4.	France	1	1	4	5
5.	Italy	2	2	5	7
6.	Sweden	1	2	14	7
7.	Norway	1	2	4	7
8.	Egypt	0	1	1	2
9.	Denmark	0	1	0	1
10.	Great Britain	0	1	1	3
11.	Luxembourg	0	1	0	3
12.	Yugoslavia	0	1	0	7
13.	Greece	0	1	0	9
DQ.	Czechoslovakia	3	1	15	3