

“The derby of all derbies” of Minas Gerais highlands: the genesis of soccer rivalry between Athletico and Palestra

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Rogério Othon Teixeira ALVES*
Silvio Ricardo da SILVA**
Sarah Teixeira SOUTTO MAYOR**
Georgino Jorge de SOUZA NETO*

*Centro de Ciências
Biológicas e da Saúde,
Universidade Estadual
de Montes Claros,
Montes Claros MG,
Brasil.

**Escola de Educação
Física, Fisioterapia e
Terapia Ocupacional,
Universidade Federal
de Minas Gerais, Belo
Horizonte, MG, Brasil.

Abstract

This paper has the intention of investigating the genesis of the rivalry between the soccer clubs Palestra Italia and Club Atletico Mineiro between 1921 and 1942, in the city of Belo Horizonte - MG. Besides examining said rivalry, we turn our attention to the other elements that surround it and constitute the experiences of the subjects and of the act of supporting a squad. Periodicals published by the press during the stated period were used as sources. Thus, newspapers belonging to archives such as the Public Newspaper Library of Minas Gerais, the Official Press of Minas Gerais, the Public Archives of the City and Linhares Collection were consulted and notes, columns and sections covering clashes between Athletico and Palestra became the raw material for the preparation of this narrative. It was noted that the press played a very conducive role to the construction of a tradition created to leverage the sports/soccer spectacle. The attempt to control behaviors emerged as an "education for supporters", which dictated a certain conduct, but also nurtured a rivalry in order for it to be able to solidify and seep into the daily lives of subjects who adhered.

KEY WORDS: History; Tradition; Supporter; Education.

Introduction

Mário RODRIGUES FILHO¹ was one of the greatest icons of Brazilian soccer literature in the 20th century. His commentary was inspired on the common experiences of supporters and he used terms and idioms that left a mark on the language and were either originated in laypeople's speak or crafted by the writer himself. These were decisive factors for the vast reach of his work, which would later become the objects of social science studies.

To him,

[...] the people wouldn't have become passionate about soccer if subjects didn't relate to a team, their team, with its flag and jerseys; whoever supports a team is inevitably tied to it, for better or worse, whether in happiness or in misery (p.4).

As noted by Rodrigues Filho, soccer wouldn't have attained such massive status if it weren't for the arisal and solidification of an affective bond between the supporter and their club. When referring to this process, highlighting the fact that it was built upon

an agenda is in order, as the way the act of supporting is carried out today did not emerge with the creation of soccer teams, but was created and incorporated by subjects along the way and notably incited by the evergrowing interest of the media in the games that were being played in the freshly built fields.

Regarding the city of Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais), considering that the first clubs were founded in the first years of the 20th century, it can be inferred that the act of supporting a team and the identification with it must only have appeared well into the century's first decade.

The shift from detached support to the consolidation of the passion for a team coupled with the core feeling of belonging (my team) wasn't linear, but plural and dynamic. At the time of the first consistent string of soccer matches in Belo Horizonte, what could be observed was the selectiveness of both the audience and of players, marked by distinction and social status^{2, a}.

Between 1904 and 1908, the scenario of soccer in the city^b was disrupted and the audience began to focus more on social engagement than on supporting a specific team. In that period, subjects involved in this process (whether the players or the audience) were notably concerned with the development of sportsmanship and their actions were geared towards making the game a relevant medium of social coexistence. In the first decade of the 20th century, the so-called “sportsmen” and “sportswomen” were young people from Belo Horizonte’s high society who firmly believed in progress and modernization, values which were still budding at the time. After becoming the national choice (having previously competed with cycling and horse racing), soccer undergoes important changes in the beginning of the second decade of the 20th century. One of them was regarding the audience, which grew significantly and became more involved with the sport.

According to MELO³, this new scenario in which sports and leisure gain a social meaning, can be understood through the lens of the experiences they represent, as follows:

[...] a predominant strategic role and the signs of a new *modus vivendi*, a characteristic trait of the type of modern city which was starting to form, articulated with all the spheres which were then being created. They were soaked in luxury ideals, in social divide, in the influence of technology, in the spectacularization of the human body, in the growing importance of the image and in perplexity caused by speed and fleetingness (p.2).

From the start, the acknowledgement of soccer as an important phenomenon which has historically been incorporated into the Brazilian culture and identity, allows us to examine the experience of the subjects who, in the span of the more than a hundred years which constitute the history of this sport in Brazil, have bestowed upon it the vast array of meanings soccer has in the present date.

From this point of view, the writings of Mário Filho help in understanding the central matter of this paper: unveiling the invention process of the rivalry established between the main soccer clubs from Minas Gerais up to this day, Atlético and Cruzeiro (former Palestra Itália). Minas Gerais’ “derby of all derbies” was not such in the infancy of soccer in that state; instead, it only arose almost three decades after newspapers had announced the appearance of soccer in Minas Gerais’ then recently-founded capital city.

The term “invention” is purposefully used to highlight the fact that this rivalry was created

intentionally and to oppose an essentialist outlook on its existence, which connects it directly and a priori to the very foundation of both teams. The use of the word “invention” allows us to look into the important role played by the press (namely the newspapers) in the creation of hostility between those who supported different squads. It also leads to thinking about the incentive to (if not the creation of) a more developed sense of belonging to a club among supporters.

In small notes and full-page stories and among pictures and headlines, we were able to locate the emergence of clashes started by the various soccer subjects involved in soccer somehow, such as players, referees, club directors, policemen and, above all, supporters. From the beginning there is a noticeable strengthening of the rivalry, a relationship constituted of important elements that, along the decades, composed the contemporary significance of the Atlético x Cruzeiro derby in the State of Minas Gerais.

Thus, the cornerstone for our understanding of this rivalry is the result of a tailored “strangeness of the other”, a historic construct that came after the foundation of those clubs; in other words, we are able to see that, in the early years of soccer in Belo Horizonte, there was a shifting preference to one team or the other, according to what each team represented to the local community at different times, rather than according to an opposition which arose from either clubs. A note in the *Minas Geraes* newspaper describing an exhibition match for a festival in 1910 is a testament to the absence of a sentiment of rivalry between two squads:

The beautiful festival was very lively, having attracted a great number of families and gentlemen from the finest layer of our community to the “Sport Club Bello Horizonte” field [...]. The clash was between “Sport Club de Bello Horizonte” and “Riachuelo F.C.”, from Rio, who came out as the winner. The brave young men were largely applauded by the expectators and grateful for the pleasantries with which our community showered them⁴ (p.6).

This paper is grounded on the assumption that, in soccer, rivalry has become a central element to the sports spectacle and encompasses several topics which are relevant to the researches that revolve around this subject from the perspective of human and social science and examine issues such as violence, consumerism, identity, power relations, membership codes mediatic appropriation, among others. It is hard, not to say impossible, to imagine the extent of the reach of soccer within culture (as

presently observed) without the rivalry between clubs and supporters.

From its aristocratic origins, strongly entrenched in a physical-sportive culture influenced by modern European ideals, soccer in Belo Horizonte saw its share of “sururus”^c and all sorts of disruption. In opposition to an audience commonly labeled as “families from

the best layer of society”, newspaper started referring to the spread of undesirable, uncivilized people. With time, more precisely between 1930 and 1940, the concern with an “education for supporters” arises and goes beyond the borders of the soccer fields, into the daily city life, due to the disturbing excitement caused by soccer in the capital of Minas Gerais.

Method

In order to address the issues above, we analyzed newspaper editions published in Belo Horizonte between 1921 and 1942, a crucial period for the outlining of the rivalry between Atlético and Palestra Itália. Our first benchmark is the year in which Palestra Itália was founded and the last one is set at the time this club went through significant changes and lost the name related to the Italian community.

Thus, we consulted the archives belonging to the Public Newspaper Library of the State of Minas Gerais, to the Official Press of the State of Minas Gerais, to the Public Archive of the City and to the Linhares Collection^d foram consultados. We could observe that, in that period, there was a progressive weakening of the triad formed Atlético, Palestra and América (another important squad in Belo Horizonte at the time) and, consequently, the consolidation of the former two as the main character of the soccer scene in Minas Gerais^e.

When consulting the newspapers found in the aforementioned archives, the ones which dedicated sections to sports and soccer were considered a priority, namely the *Diário de Minas*, the *Gazeta Esportiva*, the *Minas Geraes*, the *O Estado de Minas*, the *Folha da Tarde*, the *Folha de Minas* and the *Estado de Minas*. In the decades to which the research was narrowed down, soccer had already become one of

the most popular sports in Belo Horizonte and was often featured in periodic press, which supports the choice for this type of publication as source.

A total of 54 news stories were selected for this analysis, but this number is far from the total of stories researched, given the great amount of sources used and the span of 20 years with which we worked. Due to the restraints of this text, not all of the matches we studied could be featured in this study, which also justifies some leaps in the time frame that had to be made, since we elected the source-stories we reckoned would best fit the stated goals of this paper (albeit striving to maintain a cohesive account) considering the many potential approaches this study could follow based on the sheer volume of the research.

When addressing events throughout the period in the city of Belo Horizonte chosen as subject, we aim to look beyond the history of the clubs involved in the rivalry hereby scrutinized and beyond the clashes in the fields and outside of them. Our goal is to examine the facts and the pieces of information that aids us in understanding the constitution of rivalries related to the act of supporting in order to grasp the intricacies of soccer and its surrounding subjects, by means of the perspective with which historical studies gift us.

Results and discussion

The first soccer clashes in Belo Horizonte

For the reader to fully understand the history of this subject matter, it is important to illustrate the soccer scene in Belo Horizonte before one of this storyline’s main character, Palestra Itália, was founded. Prior to that, the *Club Athletico Mineiro* and the *America Football Club* were the first clubs to

establish a competitive relationship in the city, which would announce the upcoming sentiment of rivalry.

Both teams (Atlético and América) had very similar origins. The former, whose colors were black and white, was founded in 1908 by young aristocratic students, in the Municipal Park’s bandstand, one of the main leisure spots of the freshly-founded capital, established in 1897. The

latter, whose colors were green and white, was founded in 1912, in the vicinities of the Bahia Street (also an important part of the town), by privileged young people, just as Atlético. Their biggest difference was that América's squad was formed mainly by children, in order for young boys to have somewhere to play soccer, whilst Atlético was formed by highschoolers. Some years later, América started to accept teenagers and adults too.

The moment in which those two clubs appear is a testimony to the growth of soccer in Belo Horizonte. After a short period of scarce soccer clubs, caused by the liquidation of the then-existing teams in 1907 (the first ones having been founded in 1904), the year of 1908 inaugurated a new stage for the sport and it was then that other squads were created⁶. In that period, the Villa Nova Atlético Clube (1908), the Sport Club Mineiro (1908), the Gymnasio Football Club (1909), the Republicano Football Club (1909), the Horizontino Football Club (1909), the Minas Geraes (1910), the Yale Sport Club (1910), the Palmeiras Football Club (1912), the Club de Sports Hygienicos (1913) and the Cristovão Colombo (1915) appeared, among others.

In 1915, the city saw the creation of the league entitled *Liga Mineira de Sports Athleticos*, a central entity in the future development of soccer and of the act of supporting in Minas Gerais. In the same year, the league promoted the first edition of what is currently Minas Gerais' state championship. At the time, the competition was called "Taça da Cidade" (City Cup) and was played by the main clubs of that period. Atlético was the victor, and came in front of América, Cristovão Colombo, Yale and Hygienicos^f.

However, América Futebol Clube reigned supreme in the following years, winning all competitions in the period between 1916 and 1925. At that moment, there was already a brewing sense of identification of supporters with the clubs, which was further encouraged by the very creation of the Liga, which also started arranging other championships. In spite of that, the printed media did not report such a rivalry that would cause feelings of hatred and hostility among supporters, although the clash between Atlético and América was the first one to cause restlessness in the supporters prior to the games.

In 1926 and 1927, Atlético regains its previous status and conquers their second state championship. In one of their first wins, in 1927, the *Correio Mineiro* reported the moment when the historical rivals met, "[...] with an audience of more than five

thousand people of which a good portion was of families belonging to the finest layer of our society"⁷ (p.3). The newspaper also argued that the match perfectly showcased the local elite.

In their sports section, the *Minas Geraes*, in 1929, portrayed the amicable relationship between the two squads, although they had previously been described as great rivals. The two most prominent sports clubs in the State, however, ambas eram dotadas de simpatias mútuas e sentimentos de irmandade, as illustrated by the following note:

[...] today's clash between the two rivals will be one of those where the spectators will feel, time and again, their hearts beating with pure emotion and excitement. The relationship between the two glorious squads is imbued in a warm friendliness that involves all of the people from Minas Gerais who, even from outside the capital, follow their two dear clubs with lively excitement, proud of their state's sport scenario. This is why we can foresee that today's will be the the best sports afternoon of the year, which will allow us the pleasure of watching the "association's" technique alongside the intensity, energy and bravery, always worthy of our greatest compliments, with which the **two sister squads** will battle in the field⁸ (p.11, emphasis added).

The quote above might reflect not only the relationship between the two clubs, but also the very purposes of soccer at that moment. Soccer was openly targeted at a strict portion of the people of Minas Gerais, and its drivers were the physical and moral education of the youth, still strongly guided by the gentlemanly ideals of the British game⁸. Thus, "civility" codes were an integral part of this sport, with the aim of educating a society which rushed towards modernity; this scenario would suffer abrupt changes in the following years, which were marked by the gradual weakening of one of the main characters of the "aristocratic" sport: América.

Up to 1931 América was still somewhat more powerful than Atlético, but with the 6x2 result favoring the latter right at the beginning of the season, Atlético would start its rise to the top, with more wins and championships. The *Estado de Minas* newspaper reported, at the time of the aforementioned match "[...] a heated and loyal game, where America underwent one of the worst misadventures in its history in the sport"⁹ (p.6) . This downward spiral was then intensified in the first years of professional practice in Belo Horizonte, which proved to be very upsetting for America.

According to MOURA¹⁰, soccer was defined as an amateur practice by a statute until 1933. Professionalism in Brazil would blossom first in Rio de Janeiro, with the foundation of the Liga Carioca de Futebol (Carioca Soccer League). People from São Paulo then followed suit and the professional practice spread through the nearest states, such as Minas Gerais. It is worth noting that the year of 1933 was a defining moment for the new perspective on soccer that would characterize the sport in Belo Horizonte. The movement towards professionalism seemed irreversible. SOUZA NETO¹¹ was assertive when he said that “[...] there was not much left from the aristocratic influence on soccer as it was in its first years in the capital of Minas Gerais” (p.114).

At that moment, things that were already being quietly done (such as paying players to compete for certain teams^h) would become official aspects of the institutionalized profession. However, amidst an atmosphere of change which would define the fate of soccer in Brazil, America, went against those novelties and kept fighting for soccer to remain an amateur practice. The club came to the point of suggesting that the professionalization should only be done on paperⁱ and players should continue playing for free. Their appeals were rejected and their resistance was possibly a central factor for their decline.

Academic literature on this matter is still incipient, which proves to be an obstacle for a deeper analysis of those circumstances. Nevertheless, America is known to have suffered through a long spell of defeats after they won their tenth championship, the exact moment that professionalism arrived at the capital; all of this probably lessened the strength of the rivalry between America and Atlético.

Still, apart from the conflicts regarding the shift from amateurism to professionalism, another important factor that may have added to the diminishment of the rivalry between the clubs we have portrayed up to this point is the foundation of the club which represented the Brazilian-Italian community. SOUZA NETO¹¹ announced the emergence of Palestra Itália as the third rival power in Belo Horizonte’s soccer scene from its first years in existence. Founded in 1921, the club would create a new perception of fight and competitiveness. While Atlético Mineiro appeared in Belo Horizonte’s early years, when its identity was still under construction, Palestra Itália emerged amidst very different circumstances. Italians were not the poor immigrants who had arrived at Minas Gerais to fulfill the need for Manpower left by the

abolition of slaves anymore. Their community in the city was, at the end of the decade of 1910, exclusive and organized. Concurrently to the nationalism that arose in Europe after World War I, there appeared *Societá Sportiva Palestra Italia*, two years after the birth of the Italian fascist party. Sporting the colors of the Italian flag (green, white and red), during four years Palestra only admitted Italian players or players of Italian ancestry, in compliance with their policy.

In April 1921, three months after its foundation, but still before the first clashes against Atlético e America, *Diário de Minas*’ section *Vida Sportiva* (Sports Life) described the new club as follows: “[...] Although it is a new association, Palestra is already changing our sports scene by means of the fast progress with which they are advancing”¹² (p.2). In the foundation year of the *Societá Sportiva Palestra Italia*, and after they had competed in a championship that allowed them to move up a tier, they were already among the top clubs in the local scene. Palestra’s big feat in 1921 was playing the final match of the secondary teams in the City Championship^l, in their year of debut. Such an event deserved the attention of the *Diário de Minas* and showed that the Italian squad was born with notable strength:

It is said, however, that strong, skilled and confident Palestra, doesn’t want anything to do with names or tradition, in which, to a certain extent, they’re right¹³ (p.3).

Today’s sports fest in the Prado Mineiro neighborhood was the type to generate great interest. It can be said that, judging by the anticipation with which is expected, the clash between Palestra and America is already a remarkable encounter. In these last few days, in our conversation circles about sports, the magnificent battle has been all that’s talked about. We are definitely going to experience an admirable struggle in the field and stupendous enthusiasm from the supporters. The opinions regarding the results couldn’t be more divergent¹⁴ (p.3).

The comfort zone in which the two traditional squads were was rapidly transformed into a triad formed by America, Atlético and Palestra. In 1931, 10 years after Palestra had been founded, the *Diário da Tarde* describes the precocious success of the *parakeets*^k and *Nininho*, their first greatest idol:

The S.S. Palestra Italia became a powerful and prestigious squad, earning the support of the population of our city. [...] The virtuous “parakeets”, young in age, have conquered vast

feasts as perfect adults, giving a striking example of how much strong, well-guided willpower means. It is fair to state, as a mention to their honor, that the 1930 championship was won without so much as a tie, which points to the vigour of the “eleven”, among which the insinuating figure of Nininho, a top-tier star stands out¹⁵ (p.1).

If in the beginning of the 1920's the rivalry between America e Athletico centered the attention of the sporting life in the Capital, 1926 brought a major change. Between 1926 and 1930 all titles were in the hands of new opponents: Athletico (1926-1927) and Palestra (1928-1929-1930). During this period, Palestra's crowd came to occupy a significant space on the soccer scene in Belo Horizonte, sharing with Athletico's and America's supporters the symbolic status of the best, biggest crowd¹¹.

The Italian club could already be deemed a team of equal strength against the major associations. Matches between Athletico and Palestra at that moment, in the last years of the 1920s and in the beginning of the 1930s, showed that there was a mutual animosity between them: they were “[...] irreconcilable and powerful opponents in the fields of Minas Gerais”¹³ (p.1).

The creation of the rivalry between Athletico and Palestra: “an atmosphere of hatred”

The history of clashes between Athletico and Palestra begins on 17 April 1921. According to the *Diario de Minas*, there was an unexpected triumph of the newly established team of Italian settlers. The match, “whose result aroused general interest and curiosity, ended with a brilliant victory by Palestra, by 3-0”¹⁶ (p.2). This would be the prelude to lively encounters, worthy of the greatest journalistic attention, because in the first game in the history of the two clubs, there is a noticeable interest from the press in the city's new soccer rivalry. *Athletico x Palestra* did not go by unnoticed.

The same newspaper described their second encounter as the most peculiar and heated one, already glimpsing at the creation of an impending rivalry “[...] between the club of the Italian community and the traditional Athletico Mineiro”¹⁷ (p.2). The atmosphere that was generated by the defeat of Athletico to Palestra in their first match branded this clash as one of the most important sports events of Belo Horizonte.

In this initial period, in which the Palestra Italia only admitted oriundis¹ players (1921-1925), the

two clubs met eight times, and their last clash, on September 20, 1925, was played at a festival that celebrated the date of the unification of Italian peninsula, an event of great importance to the Italians. In these first eight games, Palestra had an advantage in number of victories and goals scored. There were three wins for the Italian community, three draws and two wins for Athletico. At the end of this first period, Palestra had already demonstrated great power, facing Athletico as an equal.

However, the Italian exclusiveness would come to an end. According to COUTo¹⁸, Palestra, in order to recruit good Brazilian players and to create more affinity with the rest of the population in 1925, in addition to removing the clause in its statute that forbid the participation of players of other descents, adopted the name *Sociedade Sportiva Palestra Italia*, now in Portuguese.

The intensification of the rivalry between clubs might be noticed especially in the behavior of the crowd in the ninth game. The newspaper *Correio Mineiro* described the match in great detail: “The [...] audience had about 5 thousand people and the crowd that both clubs attracted to the field on the day before yesterday was magnificent”¹⁷ (p.3). The description of reprehensible acts by fans of Palestra and Athletico who were involved in a fight after the game by the newspaper is interesting:

[...] In the bleachers where Athletico's fans were seated, some “undesirables” began to cause disturbances, which prompted the reaction of some incensed Palestra fans, which escalated the conflict, that reached quite an unpleasant dimension. (...) Something we cannot help but criticize is the attitude of some Palestra supporters who intervened in a disastrous manner, showing no respect even for the honorable old ladies who were in the bleachers⁷ (p.3).

Still on the content of that note, it is worth highlighting the difference in the meanings attributed to the words “audience” and “fans”, both already imbibed in an idea that would prevail over the years: “audience” referred to the amount of people who watched the game (which is similar to the idea of spectators), and “fans” as a group of subjects bound by passion and by the sense of belonging to a club. At this time, there is a transition in the use of these words in the papers, a shift in the use of “audience” to “fans” (at the beginning, made use of the term assistance with undisguised prevalence).

Labeled *undesirables*, some fans started behaving outside the norms deemed suitable for the soccer

audience, characterized by the aristocratic and chivalrous ideals envisioned in the early twentieth century. At that time, this change was depicted in newspapers, which showed clear signs of discontent: *riots, incensed, unpleasant and disastrous* were some of the words used to define the behavior of Atlético's and Palestra's crowds. This points to a landmark of the genesis of a more concrete and noticeable rivalry, embraced by those who cared about soccer in the capital.

The reality of the matches no longer had the former allure of soccer events on the city fields. The refinement came from sportswriters, as we can see in the description of some ladies who were watching Atlético's massive 9x2 victory over Palestra^m, in 1927, published by the *Gazeta Esportiva*¹⁹:

Atlético strived to beat its loyal rival, Palestra. A wave of unmatched enthusiasm had seeped into those hearts, filling them with strong emotion. Among the delicate flowers which decorate the green-and-white squad's field, miss M. L. stood out for her brilliant way of supporting, either making dainty gestures or quietly approving the performance of the black-and-white squad. [...] Three ladies who, maybe ignoring the shouts and the fuss made by the fans, calmly talked to each other during last Sunday's match (p.3).

Attending the stadium slowly became an accessible activity to many people. The image of the fan gradually replaced the mere being present in the stands. After six straight runner-up titles (1922/23/24/25/26/27) and the historic defeat suffered in 1927, Palestra Itália became the triple champion of the city (1928/29/30). And, even if the first match in the 1928 league was won by Atlético, by 2-0, Palestra would only be defeated again in 1931. During this period, the papers emphasized an enthusiastic publicization of matches

The *Minas Geraes* was not economic in their description of the eleventh game: “[...] our capital had the opportunity to watch a surprising spectacle on Sunday”²⁰ (p.10). In order to report the defeat suffered by Palestra Itália in that year, the newspaper called the match a *lion fight*. The stands and their vicinities comprised the “[...] excited and enthusiastic fans, who amounted to more than 10,000 people”. Atlético's victory was acknowledged “[...] with displays of joy and happiness by thousands of black-and-white supporters, signaling a matter of great importance”¹⁸ (p.10).

The *O Estado de Minas* stated that “[...] rarely would the sports world have the opportunity of appreciating a soccer encounter such as the one experienced on the day before yesterday”²¹ (p.3). The

newspaper described fans divided in “two crowds who cheered enthusiastically, shouting the name of their favorite players”²¹ (p.3): for Atlético, they were Jairo, Said and Mário de Castro and for Palestra Itália, they were Nininho, Ninão e Bengala.

However, this match was followed by a great fuss caused by a letter published in the *A Pedidos* (published by request) section of the *O Estado de Minas* newspaper. Supposedly written by a Palestra fan, it brought vile words targeted at Atlético. Palestra's board reproached and criticized this action. Regardless of authorship, the use of the letter by the newspaper heated the atmosphere between the teams, and was able to “[...] create an atmosphere of rivalry and hatred”²²:

[...] No Palestra fan, or even, no sportsman would be able to describe that. It was certainly the work of some evil spirit who wanted to cast, around the glorious Palestra, an atmosphere of rivalry and hatred. After the match on the 2nd day of this month, there were people who, in the name of Atlético, went too far, stepping over the borders of reason and decency. But this was not done by Atlético nor by its supporters. Whoever is guided by a glorious and chivalrous tradition, such as Atlético Mineiro, cannot stoop to such a level as the unbalanced ones did (p.6).

This article snippet showcases the press as a fundamental space for the promotion of rivalry, by means of highlighting the clashes that consolidated the form and the content of the feeling of opposition and estrangement of the “other”

In the following year, the *Minas Geraes* published an account-chronicle that sought to explore the events that surrounded the encounter between Atlético and Palestra. The journalist used a lot of metaphors that hint to the importance of the motions for the match.

The sports Sunday emptied the city center very early. Belo Horizonte became Atlético's field. At noon, the crowd of supporters began moving. Full cars. Buses moving heavily. Moving uphill, large groups of people conveyed the idea of a cumbersome migration²³ (p.12-3).

Gradually, the athletic stadium bleachers were being filled and forecasts began: “[...] 15,000! 18,000! On one side of the stands were the fans of Atlético, the city's biggest squad. On the other, Palestra fans[...]. The crowds look at each other. Palestra! Atlético! “Near the end of the game, the Atlético crowd begins to leave and the “stands were starting to get empty”, but there was still time for “some fights among fans. Punches and disturbance.”²³ (p.12-3).

Packed stadiums were not a novelty anymore, neither were the diverse ways of disagreement among fans. Atlético x Palestra: after all, what did this encounter represent at a certain point? “[...] For our people, it is the greatest in the world,” according to the *Minas Geraes*. Atlético represented “a kind of sturdy democracy, unchanged by defeats.” On the other hand, Palestra was portrayed as “a bunch of Brazilians who some fans consider Italian. Especially on match days. Out of stubbornness. For the sake of opposition.” What feelings were provoked by this game, according to the newspaper? “Wanting to laugh and crying. A horrible mix. Something that not even God would be able to express. The people were waiting. The greatest anxiety of 1929. Atlético fans were certain of its victory. Palestra was certain of its victory”. The match ended in 5-2 for the “Italian-Brazilian” team and the “Palestra folks earned, easily, the support of the people of Belo Horizonte”²⁴ (p.11).

The fifteenth match, which took place on June 1, 1930, was the last of the invincibility streak of Palestra by Atlético. The *Minas Geraes* described the expectation generated by the game teased and warned:

Yes, it's today. A historical date. The greatest day of the year. People are vibrating with pure enthusiasm. Others mix enthusiasm with ambition. Big bets both on Athletic and Palestra. On Monday, new money types. And sad subjects, just as the ones who spend everything in Carnival²⁵ (p.12).

In that same year the *Minas Geraes* stated: Palestra versus Atlético “never needed any promotion”²⁶ (p.11). At last, the newspaper declared “[...] Palestra was created in Belo Horizonte with the purpose of always defeating Atlético”²⁴ (p.11). This was certainly a situation that unsettled the black-and-white crowd.

The year of 1931 it held seven matches between Atlético and Palestra, a record number of encounters up to that point. On March 1, the *Minas Geraes* depicted the explicit *soccer* rivalry between the “[...] the strongest opponents of the fields of Minas Gerais”, which caused an exaggerated pre-game excitement. Excessive preference fully justified “the keen interest with which the people from Belo Horizonte who supported Atlético waited for the match”²⁷ (p.12). The *Estado de Minas* portrayed the expectation for the greatest battle of the year.

And it was exclusively for this match that soccer fans lived this week. Palestra was all they could talk about. Atlético was all they could talk about. On the corners, on the tramcars, in the cafés, on the sidewalks, all around groups of supporters

were talking only about the official subject matter.

Who will win? Atlético? Palestra?²⁸ (p.6).

In the face of such expectation, according to the papers, the Palestra board, foreseeing unpleasant events during the match, publicly addressed their crowd: “[...] may each fan be the judge of his own acts, thus avoiding unpleasant events that may damage the good reputation enjoyed by our club in sporting circles of this capital. “The request ended reminding that it was “the duty of our fans to be honest and fair when enjoying the game, and, putting passion aside, to applaud with enthusiasm the amateur players who will tread the grass”²⁸ (p.6).

At this point, there starts to appear more evidence of the promotion of a kind of education for supporting via periodical press, which tried (sometimes subliminally, sometimes explicitly) to determine how to behave in the stands. The *Estado de Minas* itself made this intention clear: “[...] law enforcing and civil authorities will be very strict with fans who use words, gestures or actions to insult club directors, players, referees or supporters”²⁸ (p.6).

But the requests did not achieve their purpose. After the match, the *Minas Geraes* portrayed the game and stated that the great mass of people present in Palestra's stadium witnessed, “with applause and cheers, an exciting struggle between the strongest opponents of Minas Gerais”. The newspaper ended calling attention to the “[...] serious conflict between supporters of the squads” caused by anxiety and “overexcitement” in the stands²⁹ (p.15).

It is also worth noting the more detailed description of the *Estado de Minas*. The game did not end at the regular time. Atlético, following their president's order, feeling damaged by this, abandoned the field. The note said: “[...] It was just unfortunate. Atlético should have acted differently in respect to its opponent and to the audience”. Regarding the fans, it is worth noting the newspaper's disgust with the behaviors they deemed devious.

The crowd that populated the stands in the Paraopeba Av. field are not fans. They are a bunch of irresponsible people, who don't have any regard for the property of others. True fans cheer, shout, complain, threaten, but never destroy. When Atlético scored their third goal, the people in the stands brought down the fences and, after the game, part of the seats were also damaged by their fury. It was, undoubtedly, a sad display on the part of our “fans”. Considering all that transpired, we could wish there had been a policeman for each fan²⁸ (p.6).

The scenes of destruction caused by the surrus were an evidence of the stress caused by the match. Police would then become an essential part of those encounters. At the next game, Atletico would have one more chance at breaking the three-year spell they endured without any wins over Palestra. And, perhaps exactly because of that, *Minas Geraes* warned the readers about “[...] the sensationalism that characterized the struggles waged among the biggest opponents of the fields of Minas Gerais”³⁰. The result of the match of soon invoked “[...] palpitating interest from those fond of our British sport”³⁰ (p.12-3).

The *Estado de Minas* emphasized the victory of Atletico over Palestra, for the latter had spent “[...] three years without knowing the hardship of losing to any of the capital’s clubs”³¹ (p.6). Another highlight in the paper was the expectation regarding the behavior of the fans, because there was a concern that violent incidents would occur as it had happened in the previous game: “[...] we can hope that in the near future we will not watch shameful scenes that are a disservice to our soccer supporters”²⁹ (p.6). By 1931, fans had definitely ceased to be mere spectators and become a concern for the smoothness of the sport, which already showed its potential as a spectacle.

“The tradition rivals”, Atletico and Palestra’s matches provided to the “sportsmen of Belo Horizonte the most memorable struggles we have had the chance to watch”³² (p.6). These words, printed by the *Estado de Minas*, translated the atmosphere of rivalry that surrounded this encounter and showed the enthusiasm of both crowds

Considering that the C.A. Mineiro holds a vast majority of supporters in Belo Horizonte, it is easy to predict, mainly for those who are used to attend the matches, that there will be intense “shouting” and a high dose of joy. The “parakeets” fans, on their side, will not stay behind and, with each accomplishment by their favorites, they shook the stadium with enthusiasm crowned by the loud vocal approval of supporters, who greeted and egged their players on³² (p.6).

In their Sunday edition, the *Minas Geraes* reinforced that the game caused “[...] gnawing anxiety” because Atletico and Palestra “had the best players in Minas Gerais and when their squads “clash, all the city shakes beneath the emotions caused by the battle and at the whimsical colors of its remarkable ins-and-outs.”³² (p.10).

It’s a duty to confess that soccer men - both players and spectators - some more and some less, all imprint a bit of bouncing, shouting, irrational

ones on their applause, when their team of choice either follows a straight path towards the victory or falls down the pit of defeat a³³ (p.10).

In the twenty-first game, played on November 29, 1931, the *Estado de Minas* described an extremely competitive match, as it was customary in matches between Atletico and Palestra: “The Belo Horizonte people in the audience took the green-and-white stadium by storm, elbowing here, pushing there, to better accommodate themselves”³⁴ (p.6). And at the end of the report, as important as the victory of Atletico by 2-1, was the fact the fans behaved “[...] with a lot of discipline, a lot of order. There was not a protest. Not a single boo,” despite the field being crowded³² (p.6).

The “[...] two old rivals of our fields”, as described by the *Minas Geraes*³⁵ (p.9), would meet in the last match of the year, at Atletico Mineiro’s Stadium. At the end of the game, the newspaper displays noticeable relief by the newspaper, as the match ended without any conflict: “[...] the sportsmanship shown yesterday by the people and players gave the unbelievers of our sport new hopes for peace in the heart of Belo Horizonte’s sport scene”. The good example was welcome to the sport in the capital, as it was in “a continuous and damaging boiling point” due to the constant scenes of violence in the stadiums of the city³⁵ (p.9).

In one of the opinion pieces published in the *Sports* section, the *Minas Geraes* had already announced how established the rivalry was between the teams:

Palestra and Atlético, equal in power and in the drama they bring to each match played between them, were considered by our sports fans as powerful, irreconcilable rivals. In fact, there was a time when the mutual animosity between the two clubs of the hills was so big that everything that was said in order to diminish or hide it was futile. Sometimes the two great competitors exchanged toasts, prosperity wishes, flowers; a panegyric speech would be written and the captain of one of the squads would recite on the field, as if the squads were the best friends in the world. We, who watched all of it, even felt touched, thinking about the admiration both teams had for each other. But all of that came to be greeds bearing gifts, and when the ball started rolling, the rivalry swepted the pleasantries away [...]³⁶ (p.11).

A few years later, the *Estado de Minas* newspaper warned that the sporting audience of Belo Horizonte expected “the match between Atletico and Palestra, old and traditional rivaes of our fields, for the Cup Moura Costa, with indescribable interest”³⁷ (p.10). The importance of this meeting was acknowledged

all over the city. Thus, the newspaper concluded: “[...] in order for a stadium to receive a large crowd, it was enough to mention that Atletico and Palestra will play against each other”³⁷ (p.10).

In the following games we noticed a greater use of the word “derby” to describe the confrontation between them. At the time, this expression was used with due restraint, only employed in significant games: “[...] **As always the derby Atletico x Palestra**, that happened on the day before yesterday, took a great crowd to the field and provided, through exciting moments and sensational unexpected events, intense excitement and vibration”³⁸ (p.2, emphasis added) .

“Palestra x Atletico - A remarkably complete spectacle”: this is how the *Estado de Minas* advertised their thirtieth match, which almost became another misfortune for Atletico³⁹ (p.8). The black-and-white squad only achieved a tie at the end of the game and celebrated a result which was “[...] undoubtedly honored, when it comes to competing against a rival as strong as Palestra in their own turf”. The newspaper portrayed the match as the “[...] great voice of the city that could be heard from all corners of the city, featuring intense emotions and superb moves that made everyone breathless and speechless”³⁹ (p.8).

The first game of 1935 was also fueled by all the nuances that pertained to an Atletico x Palestra, as it was described by the *Folha de Minas* newspaper, “a struggle of undescrivable emotion! One of the most sublime soccer displays in recent times”⁴⁰ (p.9). The newspaper goes on to consider the game “[...] quite a brilliant soccer spectacle on all aspects.” The two teams were responsible for a “match of violent emotions and a memorable struggle of association soccer, which transpired without so much as a small setback”⁴⁰ (p.9).

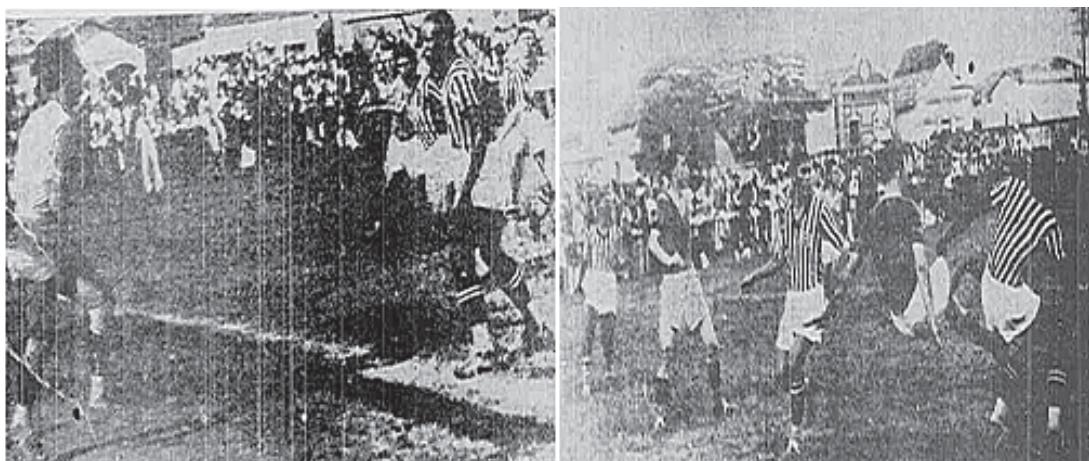
The same outlet presented the thirty-ninth game as a “[...] bright and busy spectacle; It could be said that there was not a single moment of boredom”⁴¹ (p.10). If the game was satisfactory in its unfolding and quality, ending in 3-2 for Palestra, the same thing could not be said about the behavior of players and fans: “[...] the practice of violent game degenerated

into a real ‘slaughter’, which at times changed the face of the match. It was something that greatly obscured the brightness of the match, aggravating the spirits of fans on both sides.” After the game, “[...] there was a series of riots caused by less responsible elements, who engaged in fights in and outside the field”⁴¹ (p.10).

Apparently, the forty-second game, the first of the year 1936 was the most violent until that point. The *Folha de Minas* did not spare their criticism and reported the events that they deemed negative in almost all of its sports section, “Opponents of our traditional fields, which always had the opportunity to provide the ‘crowd’ with the best and most beautiful spectacles, Atletico e Palestra did not seem like the same rivals of other times”⁴² (p.8). Instead of soccer, the crowd watched the “[...] violence enforced by the players, their disloyalty and the constant complaints against the decisions of the referee.” According to the newspaper, these “[...] were the most extreme features of this derby”⁴² (p.8).

The second game of 1936 was not any different. The *Estado de Minas* newspaper reported that “[...] unjustified complaints about the judge, threats of coming to blows, tackles aimed at disabling the opponents”⁴³ (p.9). The chivalry had been replaced by “common features of war: iodine, ether, arnica and bandages ...”. Because of “[...] the brawl among the players,” even before the end of the match, “a third of the audience, averse to the violence, peacefully left the field”⁴³ (p.9).

However, the more forceful description by *Folha de Minas* draws our attention. Expressions such as *sickening, degrading events, unpleasant incidents, annoying, blatant disregard for the public* set the tone of the article published by the newspaper. “The match that the city christened a *derby*” was laden with abuse and disruption “under a scorching heat, the game lasted two hours and 25 minutes when it should have been carried out in one hour and 40 minutes or less”⁴⁴ (p.8). The scenes of violence in the field were recorded in the pictures of the game, published by the first time ever on the pages of this newspaper as shown in FIGURE 1.



Source: Folha de Minas⁴⁵ (p.8).

FIGURE 1 - Pictures of the Atletico x Palestra derby.

At the end of the forty-fourth encounter, an unusual score was reported in the same newspaper: 6-1 to Atletico. In the stadium, “[...] the whole facility was completely crowded by an enthusiastic audience, which was actually common for the derby” because Atletico x Palestra constituted “a convergence point for all the emotions of the audience”⁴⁵ (p.10). But perhaps as unusual as the drastic score of the match, was the behavior of the police men in the field.

During that period, fights between players were no longer unusual, but at the very moment that the police intervened in the *sururu*, the spectators, “[...] flabbergasted, saw then the fanatical policemen intensify the conflict, furthering the animosity, grappling in the name of misguided beliefs”⁴⁵ (p.10). The newspaper stated that the policemen themselves were “[...] rampant partisans of fighting gangs and their beliefs inspired rude violent acts for the course of 12 minutes.” The police, fussing among Atletico’s or Palestra’s fans, pulled out their revolvers and sabers in an “embarrassing display by the law enforcers”. The conflict reflected the “[...] imbalance of the *players*,” and also, “the fondness of the police of turmoil and arbitrary acts”⁴⁵ (p.10).

In the following game, the sports headline in *Folha de Minas* announced: “The *classic* lasted 50 minutes”⁴⁶ (p.10). In the final five minutes of the second half period, “[...] unexpected events, which were characterized by indiscipline and lack of sportsmanship, came to disturb the brilliance of an afternoon that had begun with an aura of exceptional optimism.” After the cancellation of a goal that Palestra fans deemed valid, the referee, after “[...] a stronger word uttered by Niginho, expelled him from the field.” As the player didn’t comply,

after much discussion between players and police officers “[...] and against the general expectation, trampling over the rights of the paying audience and over the disciplinary rules of sports and over their own eminence, the *parakeets* decided to cease their participation in the match”⁴⁶ (p.10).

The forty-sixth encounter, on its turn, was aimed at setting a truce between the rivals. According to the *Folha de Minas*, “[...] it was the first match between the teams promoted by pacifist ideals”⁴⁷ (p.10). For the festive match, “[...] it was expected, and it was very natural that the assistance would hit a ‘record’, given the popularity of clashes between Palestra and Atletico.” But the gray afternoon with threats of heavy rainfall “[...] caused the low attendance of ‘fans’ who waited for news about the outcome or sat beside their radios”. The description of the newspaper reported that “it was a great loss for the ones who didn’t attend the match. Atletico and Palestra fought a great battle; in the end, Palestra Italia achieve a brilliant triumph” and, at this time, violence did not monopolize the pages of the newspaper⁴⁷ (p.10).

However, the desired peace did not last long. In one of the following games, Atletico won the derby by 3-1, “[...] but the intense nervousness and excess of enthusiasm” may have been “the factors of disturbance observed in the meeting between the two traditional opponents”⁴⁸ (p.10). If the last match had been “played fairly”, this one had an unfortunate outcome. After a violent act practiced by Palestra’s goalkeeper Geraldo II, against the Atletico Mineiro striker, Guara, and a subsequent retaliation, the judge expelled them both. After much arguing, it was decided that the squads would play with 10 players, when the *sururus* grew larger and involved the police, civil guards and detectives. The final balance of the

mess was: Caieira and Geraldo I, both from Palestra, were arrested and taken to the Central Police Station, where they were detained. After tempers were calmed down, the game resumed after 15 minutes of stoppage, the expelled and arrested players were replaced and, as Palestra did not have a substitute goalkeeper, the attacker “[...] Bengala volunteered to act as a goalkeeper”⁴⁸ (p.10).

In the following games, there was a noticeable rotation between admonishing bad behavior at times and extolling the brilliance of matches at others. Unlike in the previous exhibition match, the *Estado de Minas* reported that “Atletico and Palestra showed, in the derby” which was worth the lead of the 1939 league “an intense fighting spirit, making the crowd cheer”⁴⁹ (p.9). The good audience saw the awakening of “[...] an energy worthy of the rivalry of a ‘derby’ on par with its best traditions”⁴⁹ (p.9).

In the following year, the derby that was worth the leading position of the 1940 league was marked by much ruckus, as evidenced in the following note:

[...] prompted by a goal scored by Atletico and a subsequent penalty for Palestra, two *sururus* started in the field. There were aggressions, arrests, etc, of which players, coaches and other somewhat accountable people were an active party [...]. This is not the type of player our clubs need⁵⁰ (p.10).

The end of Minas Gerais soccer season of 1940 was perhaps the most outstanding in the history of the Atletico x Palestra derby until then. After the first two rounds, as described in the *Minas Geraes*, “[...] the Belo Horizonte Soccer League has cancelled the third round of their 1940 championship, and determined that it is to be decided in a two-out-of-three series, to be played by Atletico and Palestra, the leaders of the event”⁵¹ (p.10). The expectation for the game was intense, “taking the importance of the match and the value of the two contenders into account, the audience awaits its fulfillment with great and legitimate interest”⁵² (p.8).

According to the *Folha de Minas* “[...] the derby fully corresponded the expectation, leaving nothing to desire. Atletico and Palestra provided their fans with a grand show and a perfectly disciplined environment”⁵³ (p.8). The first game in the two-out-of-three series that would decide the 1940 championship “[...] caused moments of ecstasy in the Antonio Carlos stadium”. Palestra’s objectivity “[...] earned it clear and deserved triumph over Athletico” (3-1), which increased the expectation for the second game of the final round, because

Atletico had to win to go to the third and final match⁵³ (p.8).

The *Minas Geraes* reported that the second match “[...] in the two-out-of-three series, was attended by a large and enthusiastic crowd”⁵⁴ (p.6), ended with a victory for Atletico by 2-1, a result that would induce to the third decisive match that would produce the champion of Minas Gerais of 1940. According to the *Folha de Minas*, “[...] few people believed the black-and-white squad would prevail”, but their victory surprised “its fierce fans, who were massively present in Palestra stadium to cheer for their team”⁵⁵ (p.9).

The same newspaper covered the decisive match thoroughly: the soccer match was played “[...] by the worthy opponents in a disciplined and cordial environment, worthy of compliments”⁵⁶ (p.8). One can thus say that Atletico and Palestra closed the 1940 championship, “[...] with a golden key to our soccer”⁵⁶ (p.8). The importance of the encounter was explicit in the words of the newspaper.

The decisive match of the championship took an important place in the city life, moving its population and drawing thousands of people from neighbouring towns to its epicenter⁵⁶ (p.8).

The newspaper stated that the stadium of America, the neutral ground chosen for the final match, “[...] had, minutes before the start of the game, its large facilities literally packed with a big crowd.” After the end of the game, the “[...] Palestra fans organized a massive parade through the main arterial roads of the city, singing, releasing fireworks and excitedly cheering for the champions”⁵⁶ (p.8).

Similarly, a match for the final round of the event of the first stage of the 1941 championship was treated by the *Minas Geraes* as a “[...] sensational encounter, which is dominating the attention of our sports outlets: Palestra x Atletico, a World of Sensations”⁵⁷ (p.8). After the match, it was printed in the *Folha de Minas*: “the derby Atletico x Palestra, considered the ultimate spectacle of soccer in Minas Gerais”⁵⁸ (p.8).

Palestra prevailed over the championship leader and increased its possibilities of becoming twice the champion (1940/41). During the match “[...] Palestra fans sang songs of encouragement for the elite players clad with the three-colored shirt, released fireworks and chanted *one more* during the derby”⁵⁸ (p.8).

This game marks the first change in Palestra’s name. In view of the deliberations of the Brazilian government during World War II, declaring Axis countries (nations led by Germany, Italy and Japan) as enemies, the president of the Sociedade Esportiva Palestra Italia, in an referendum decision, changed the name of the

Italian club to Sociedade Esportiva Palestra Mineiro. In addition to christening the encounter “the derby of all derbies”, the *Estado de Minas* announced this change in their January 31, 1942 edition:

In view of the decree issued by the President of the Republic, who nationalized the sporting societies in Brazil, we communicate to whom it may concern that the former Sociedade Esportiva Palestra Italia, is now to be called SOCIEDADE ESPORTIVA “PALESTRA MINEIRO”, by act of its management, ad referendum of the Deliberative Council of the Club. Belo Horizonte, January 30, 1942. From the Board: - ENEAS CIRO PONI, president⁵⁹ (p.7).

The expectation for the first match of the Palestra Mineiro against Atletico Mineiro was advertised in the editions of *Minas Geraes* and *Folha de Minas*. “This war,” according to the *Minas Geraes*, “[...] is surrounded by the acute attention from the sports audience, since Atletico is leading the championship, two points ahead of second-places Palestra and Siderurgica”⁶⁰ (p.11). A victory “[...] in the magnificent derby”, was central to Palestra’s ambitions of “entering the professional championship in 1941”⁶¹ (p.9). *Folha de Minas* remembered that “[...] the old rivalry between the two squads fully and fairly justified the interest from our sports audience, under the applause of the many supporters”⁶² (p.15).

In the end, the newspaper reported that “Atletico x Palestra had produced a spectacle of cheers and enthusiasm from the audience and of dedication from their *players*”⁶² (p.15). With this victory, Atletico consolidated its climb towards the league championship and stopped Palestra from winning said championship for the second time in a row.

Perhaps due to the hardships that engulfed the following three matches, Palestra’s name would be modified again. In the next derby, the squad would play under the name of E.C. Ipiranga. In *Minas Geraes*’ October 1 edition this second change is announced.

Esporte Clube Ipiranga

The board of the Sociedade Esportiva Palestra Mineiro, which gathered on the day before yesterday in order to address important issues, decided that, from now on their team will be called Esporte Clube Ipiranga⁶³ (p.14).

Thus, 1942 was a turbulent year for Palestra’s backstage. It changed its name three times (Ipiranga was also discarded), and on the playing field, they spent more than a year without winning a match against their rival, Atletico Mineiro. After 72 fouls, Atletico won the championship “[...] beating its

seasoned opponent by 2-1”. From the *Folha de Minas* account it can be noticed that fans completely filled “[...] Barro Preto’s small stadium, to the delight of Atletico fans after the match”⁶⁴ (p.7). From the Minas Geraes, we highlight the following statement: “Ipiranga was beaten by 2-1. With this victory, Atletico was crowned twice the soccer champion, brilliantly and deservedly so”⁶⁴ (p.7).

Four days after the only derby played by Ipiranga, the *Estado de Minas*⁶⁵ (p.7) and the Minas Geraes⁶⁶ (p.8) announced that at a meeting on the previous day, the club’s Council did not endorse the decision of the board and elected a new name: Cruzeiro Esporte Clubeⁿ. Furthermore, they decided to accept the resignation of President Eneas Ciro Poni; to leave the direction of the club, for 15 days, to a governing board; to donate all trophies and bronzes to the metal campaign and to adopt a new uniform for the soccer team.

With the disclosure of those facts, the year 1942 would then end the story of the rivalry between Atletico and Palestra, which is the final benchmark of this research. However, even if the following period was characterized by significant changes in the history of former Palestra, in the long run they did not result in its weakening or in the diminishment in the rivalry built with Atletico. On the contrary, in the following decades the clashes and rivalries between fans would be intensified, and Atletico and Cruzeiro would solidify their position as the major characters of soccer in Minas a status they hold until today. The city’s *derby of all derbies*, thus labeled by the newspapers, still is the biggest sports spectacle in Minas Gerais’ highlands.

Rivalry beyond the four lines

More important to us than the unraveling of the history of these clubs and the clashes that surround them (without denying the intrinsic wealth of the clubs themselves), is challenging the construction of rivalry as a key element for understanding what soccer came to mean to the Brazilian society and specially, to the people of Minas Gerais. An integral part of the sporting spectacle, as reasoned by Mario Filho, lies in the appropriation of a feeling of rivalry. It might not be an exaggeration to say that in the same way that soccer feeds the rivalry, it also feeds soccer, a reciprocation that ensures the survival of both. Similarly, it can be inferred that a team only exists because of the other, of this strangeness of the other caused by a historically forged feeling of opposition.

Some aspects seem relevant in relation to the reality of Minas Gerais. The first one is the emergence of rivalry that, as shown by our research, did not come with the foundation of clubs. Instead, it was nourished over the years that followed the creation of Palestra. In this case, it is interesting to point out that Atletico had played exciting games against other teams like America. However, as shown by the news excerpts, although the games were able to gather large audiences in the city and were featured a vast array of news pieces in Minas Gerais newspapers, they did not come close to the “game of nerves” which constituted the clashes between Atletico and Palestra. It was from the time that these teams started playing against each other that the accusations of violence, indiscipline and lack of civility started appearing. Newspapers showed discontent with the direction the beautiful game, originally chivalrous and courteous, was taking in Minas Gerais’ highlands.

Our sources do not only reinforce their concern with well-employed morals in soccer in the capital of Minas Gerais, but also add some important ambiguities to this story. The first one lies in the realization that this sport had become so relevant to the culture of Belo Horizonte that the insistent normative pleas did not seem enough even for those hired to enforce the law. Some accounts talk about the involvement of the police itself, which was said to act with “passion” in several fights. From this perspective, it is also possible to see that the way with which the sport was appropriated by the people was, in significant occasions, very different from the aristocratic precepts that were desired for soccer at the time. Thus, we can also infer that deviant behaviors could be the signs of the solidification of rivalry, supported by competitive and vindictive precepts that gradually drifted away from the aristocratic values.

The second ambiguity is regarding to the attitude of the press. While the newspapers condemned the behavior considered deviant, they also stirred the minds of the fans, extolling one club or the other at different times. Their very writing style placed, repeatedly, both teams in opposition to each other, using of terms such as fighting, battle, warfare, among others; something that cannot be said about America and Atletico, which were enveloped in warmth and in a sense of brotherhood (at least in the media). We can highlight some examples such as “irreconcilable opponents in the fields of Minas Gerais”; “atmosphere of rivalry and hatred”; or “Atletico fans were certain

of its victory. Palestra was certain of its victory”. In some editions you can see the clear opposition that marked the two teams in the news as a “club of the Italian community and the traditional Atletico Mineiro.” Another strong example consists of a few descriptions of Palestra: “a bunch of Brazilians who some fans consider Italian. Especially on match days. Out of stubbornness. For the sake of opposition.”; or “Palestra was created in Belo Horizonte with the purpose of always defeating Atletico”.

Thus, we understand that the newspapers were a key tool for the invention of the rivalry between Atletico and Palestra, a fact that is also noteworthy given the importance of periodical press at that time, as the primary means of transmission of information among the residents of the state capital. In this case, we can also think that the clash between the clubs was augmented as a means to increase sales, given the importance of soccer to the population.

Finally, another interesting ambiguity refers to the newspapers deeming the “derby” traditional, which takes us to Eric HOBBSAWM’s⁶⁷ conception of invented traditions. According to the author, for a situation to be considered traditional, it does not necessarily have to be originated in a long-lost past, i.e., traditions can be very recent constructs, which are forged to give meaning and value to a particular practice. In this perspective, for Hobsbawm, the invented traditions seek to, whenever possible, establish a relationship with a suitable historic past, using it to legitimize actions. This situation is possible because there is a historically built concept that considers what’s traditional to be indisputable and self explanatory. So whatever falls under the definition of tradition, especially in the eyes of opinion makers (such as governments and the media, for example), carries an almost unquestionable value of historical distinction. Their use can pervade many situations of the social life, such as political speeches, government ceremonies (such as presidential and royal succession), the use of certain apparati or clothes (which are compatible with a symbol built upon a certain place) and, as exemplified by this article, sports.

Right from the first clashes between the two teams, newspaper already portrayed the meeting as traditional, which somehow seemed to add weight to news and to the matches themselves. After little more than a decade, the printed media was announcing them as “long-time rivals”, “old and traditional rivals of our fields,” among other examples found in the sources. In this regard, the symbolic and discursive character of tradition and,

therefore, the absence of enough time to support it draws our attention. The writing, guided by the addition of value to the clubs and their stories, may have been a strong driver of this competitiveness, incorporating the sense of tradition to a still recent rivalry. Undeniably, winning a “traditional” clash was not like winning any other match.

In the analysis of numerous news pieces, other discussions can be sparked. The first one is the realization that violence in soccer in Belo Horizonte has been portrayed since the mid-1920s, which may be an indication that the heated conduct stemming from the rivalry began to be forged long before the emergence of soccer firms in the late twentieth century, for example.

Regarding the hostility built between Atlético and Palestra, there might be some hypotheses that help us understand the fame that this rivalry gained in the city, beyond the manipulation by the press. Atlético and America had a very similar background: both clubs were founded by the high society of Minas Gerais, were made up of children of politicians, businessmen and successful merchants. Because the city had a small population in the early twentieth century, since Belo Horizonte had been founded in 1897, it was quite possible that the members of the two teams sustained relationships outside the fields. An example of that is the use of Atlético’s field by America’s team when the latter did not have their own place to practice. The brotherhood portrayed by newspapers can also hint at good relations between the two clubs.

Palestra, on the other hand, was formed by Italian immigrants, and appears as the “other”, the “outsider”, sporting the colors of another country. It represented those citizens who arrived in Belo Horizonte as to fulfill labor needs, but later formed a legion of workers who settled with relative success in the city. The development of Italian merchants since the foundation of the city might, in fact, have generated feelings of rejection in the society of Minas Gerais.

It is worth noting that the Italians had their own neighborhood (the Barro Preto, located in the center of the capital) and even a newspaper in their native language: the *Araldo Italiano*. Furthermore, Palestra emerged with quite some strength already, competing on equal terms from the first games played, forming a triad in the soccer scene of Minas Gerais. With the decline of America, Palestra starts to share the spotlight half-and-half with Atlético, which started a rivalry that lives on. However, the papers also showed the gradual acceptance of the club by the local citizens, for which the team began striving, using strategies such as creating the Portuguese

version of its name and allowing players who were not Italians or descendants to enter the squad.

Another possibility for discussion we can extract from our sources derives from the formatting of the rivalry, which was encouraged at times and disapproved at others, but that needed to be adjusted to fit a desired mold. It can be inferred that a project of “education for supporters” was underway, dictating (and repeating when necessary), attitudes and behavior from the fans in the stands.

From the 1920s we can observe a more regular development of deviant behavior, which resulted in interventions from law enforcers and in the institution of a “correct way to support the teams”, which tailored the attitudes that would fulfill the desire of those who controlled the spectacle. In several notes, it was recommended that the fans behaved properly, under penalty of being expelled from the fields.

The existence of a growing rivalry between clubs accentuated a sense of belonging and passion, and these, in turn, inflamed the fans who ended up incensed over the desire to see their club win. Thus, it is possible to establish a direct relationship between the existence and growth of hostility (based on a rival feeling) with the increasing sense of belonging and passion for a club.

When examining the civilizatory process, Norbert ELIAS⁶⁸, at some point of his work, elaborates on the relationship between sport, violence and emotions experienced in the sporting world. He establishes a connection between conflict and interdependence in the attempt of distinguishing our group from that of the others (outsiders) through emotions like pleasure and pain. The existence of the fans, rivalry and confrontation is a process that partially reflects this author’s idea (outsiders).

In his “A Busca da Excitação”, Norbert ELIAS⁶⁹ inquires, emphasizing the social need for conflict (tension-pleasure): “In an increasingly regulated society, how could humans ensure sufficient means of pleasurable excitement in shared experiences without the risk of socially intolerable disorder and mutual injuries?” (p.256). The author himself attempts at a potential answer, stating that “soccer, like other leisure sports, is based on the precarious balance between predictability and violence” (p.84).

Social control starts acting when there is conflict. This control is seen by the German sociologist in the coercion devices as a response to violent behaviors, whether through speeches, regulatory practices, institutionalized powers to a greater or lesser extent and in self-censorship or self-restraint

mechanisms⁶⁹. The evidence for a “normalization of conducts” is seen in the attempts to establish an organized way of supporting in Belo Horizonte, which becomes increasingly necessary with the building rivalry between the teams, notably in the games between Atletico and Palestra.

Although the purpose of this article was to go beyond an essentially descriptive representation, it was inevitable to describe the narrative superimposed on a timeline, presenting a more general and comprehensive framework of clashes between Atletico and Palestra. Still, we do not shy away from the dialogical discussion with a conceptual, supported by themes and authors that could enrich the purpose of this research.

Considering that our analysis spectrum was limited to the city of Belo Horizonte, we believe that a reasonable comparison can be made with other areas (and consequently other rivalries). Local particularities hold much potential for discovery if we maintain an open view of more generic issues (such as politics, economy, work and leisure).

Thus, we tried to understand the construction of the rivalry between Atletico and Palestra from the point of view of their surroundings (not just the rivalry itself). However, we acknowledge the fact that other eyes can (and should) be placed on the discussion presented here. As a historic exercise, the past is being continuously built, time and time again.

Notes

- a. According to Luiz Henrique de Toledo², an important discussion on the popularization of soccer shows that such a process was confronted with attempts at social distinction strategies implemented by the sports elite of the early twentieth century, who hampered as they could a more universal participation of lower classes in the playing field.
- b. Historian Raphael Rajão Ribeiro's⁶ graduate thesis on this matter is very enlightening. In it, the author talks in depth about causes and motives for oscillations in the penetration of soccer in Belo Horizonte in the beginning of the 20th century.
- c. A common idiom at the time meaning fights, brawls and conflicts within and outside the fields.
- d. This archive consists of newspapers and magazines stored by Joaquim Nabuco Linhares, who was born in Ouro Preto, in 1880. It was acquired in its entirety by the UFMG in 1976, and then entitled the “Linhares Collection”.
- e. It is important to highlight that other clubs also had a spot on Minas Gerais newspapers and had relevant conquests. They were: Villa Nova, from the city of Nova Lima, and Esporte Clube Siderúrgica, from the city of Sabará. However, without meaning to disregard the relevance of these and other team to the development of soccer in Minas Gerais, we will focus specifically on the rivalry between Atlético and Palestra.
- f. In 1914 a major competition was held: the Bueno Brandão Cup, organized by clubs Atletico, America and Yale who also competed in it. The cup was won by Atletico. This event is seen as a catalyst for the further creation of a representative /organizational entity - the League of Athletic Sports of Minas Gerais - in 1915.
- g. Another strong indication was the very language used in reports of football matches. It was quite common to import English words. The power of distinction of these tools is undeniable. In a country where the vast majority were still illiterate in their own native language, the use of terms in English presupposed they'd be understood only by a very small part of the population.
- h. At the end of the 1920s covert forms of compensation from the major clubs to their best players were commonly found, a practice that came to be known as “brown amateurism”.
- i. According to Moura¹⁰ (p.121), the America's president had imposed the following condition: the club would hold the professional title only for “keeping appearances up”, but sustaining an amateur practice. Thus, it was proposed to his players to defend the team “without the need for wages and contracts, thereby maintaining the primitive amateur formula within professionalism”.
- j. NAt that time, the city championship held, in its first tier, representatives of the major clubs, divided between the first and second teams. Thus, there was the final game of the first teams (the most valued one) and the the final game of the second teams. For more information, see the dissertation “The ball amid lined streets and a hellish dust: the first years of football in Belo Horizonte” (1904-1921), by historian Raphael Rajão Ribeiro Ribeiro⁶.
- k. Since the color of their uniform was predominantly green, Palestra's team was known at that time as “parakeets”.
- l. Oriundi is a term used to describe people of Italian ancestry, whether they are Italian citizens or not, who were born in other countries.
- m. This is the most drastic score involving the two squads up to today.

- n. Although there isn't a source to confirm this, it is possible to infer that the change of names from Palestra to Ipiranga and, subsequently, to Cruzeiro are linked to an attempt to use national symbols, (both words are a part of the Brazilian National Anthem). Ipiranga, the river whose margin was the stage of the declaration of independence; and Cruzeiro points to the Cruzeiro do Sul constellation, which can only be seen from the Southern Hemisphere. The changes are a sign of the distance being formed between the club and its Italian identity during World War II.
- o. Italian immigrants, especially merchants, not only supported the club financially by investing in its development, but also saw it as an opportunity for social recognition.

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Resumo

“O clássico dos clássicos” das alterosas mineiras: a invenção da rivalidade futebolística entre Athletico e Palestra

O presente artigo tenciona investigar a gênese da rivalidade entre os clubes de futebol do Palestra Itália e Athletico Mineiro, nos anos de 1921 a 1942, na cidade de Belo Horizonte-MG. Para além da rivalidade propriamente dita, voltamos nosso olhar para outros elementos que orbitam em torno dela, constituindo as experiências dos sujeitos e do torcer. Para tanto, utilizamos as fontes localizadas nos periódicos publicados pela imprensa no período supracitado. Assim, jornais pertencentes a acervos como Hemeroteca Pública do Estado de Minas Gerais, Imprensa Oficial do Estado de Minas Gerais, Arquivo Público da Cidade e a Coleção Linhares foram consultados. Neste sentido, as notas, colunas e seções que tratam dos embates entre Palestra e Athletico tornaram-se a matéria-prima para a elaboração desta narrativa. Podemos perceber que a imprensa colaborou, sobremaneira, na construção de uma tradição inventada para alavancar o espetáculo esportivo/futebolístico. Nestes meandros, a tentativa de um controle das condutas emerge na forma de uma “educação para o torcer”, ditando um modelo adequado de se portar, mas ao mesmo tempo, alimentando o ideário de uma rivalidade que pudesse se consolidar e marcar o cotidiano dos sujeitos envolvidos nela.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: História; Tradição; Torcer; Educação.

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ADDRESS

Silvio Ricardo da Silva
Escola de Educação Física, Fisioterapia e Terapia Ocupacional
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais
Av. Pres. Antônio Carlos, 6627
31270-901 - Belo Horizonte - MG - BRASIL
e-mail: prof.srs@gmail.com

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