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## A friendly match: sport and political culture in the Netherlands between the 1950s and the 1970s

216 In the spring of 2018, Theo Engelen published his first novel aimed at an adult audience. In *Marathon* Theo, himself an avid long-distance runner, tells the story of a middle-aged man who runs his first marathon. While braving the elements the runner reflects on two major issues that define his life. As always, given a certain degree of overlap between the main character and the author, it is tempting to look for autobiographical elements in the novel, but I will resist the temptation (for one thing, the book was not yet available at the time of writing). What I will try to do, however, is to explore how, as Theo has done in his novel, sport has been used to tell stories, in my case within the sphere of politics.

To argue that sport and politics are closely connected is to state the obvious.<sup>1</sup> That said, very few historians have offered a critical reflection on the multifaceted nature of this connection, but the American sport historian Allen Guttman (2003) is one of them. He identifies four basic perspectives. The first one concerns the role sports have played in fascist and communist regimes, for instance in terms of political propaganda. Sport emerges here as a domain where typically the young are trained for battle. Secondly, sport is political since it can have an exclusionary dimension along lines of class, race, gender and other axes of difference that limit the degree to which people can participate in sport. Thirdly, sport is intimately linked with international relations. Huge international sporting events, such as the Olympic Games, have turned into a competition between nations, while boycotts have drawn these events into the field of politics as well. Fourth and finally, Guttman mentions a neo-Marxist approach that is aimed at outlining the capitalistic and therefore repressive dimensions of sports.

Guttman (2003) acknowledges that his historiographic overview of

the connection between sport and politics is far from all-encompassing. One of the perspectives that is missing is an analysis of the role sport has played in the construction of communities of belonging, ranging from neighborhoods to the nation state and from social to political communities (Taylor, 2007; Pas, 2015). In the Netherlands, the focus of this contribution, sport clubs were an integral element of the closely-knit socio-political communities united around class and religion that defined Dutch society up until the 1960s. Much like political parties, trade unions, women's clubs, schools, and the print media, sport clubs played a key role in maintaining unity and ensured that children grew up in the safe environment of their 'own' milieu (Budel & Derks, 1990; Dona, 1981). Also missing from the overview is a consideration of the scholarship inspired by a cultural approach (Pas, 2015). In the words of sports historian Jeffrey Hill (2003, p.361), sport can be seen as 'a system of meaning through which we know the world'. In this contribution, I aim to illustrate this system. I will argue that sport acts as a semiotic reservoir, as a field that politicians across different political systems mine for discourses, symbols and signs that they can use to construct a particular persona and to convey particular political messages. In short, sport contains important political capital that politicians and other actors in the political sphere seek to use. Based on a Dutch case study, I will discuss how politicians from the late 1950s onward associated themselves with sport in various ways in an effort to win popular support. Against the background of increasing concerns among political parties over a growing divide between politicians and the people, politicians acknowledged that sport, and the platform of popular culture in general, offered them opportunities to (re)connect with the electorate – young people in particular – in new ways. At the same time, in terms of policy making, politicians embraced sports by integrating it in their political platform and by acknowledging the potential of sport to reach specific policy goals. By exploring the interaction between sport and politics from these angles, this contribution answers Paul Ward's appeal to mainstream historians to start 'playing' with sports (Ward, 2013).

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#### POLITICS AND POPULAR CULTURE

Ward's appeal can justifiably be extended to include popular culture more generally. Over the past few years, historians interested in exploring changing notions of democracy, citizenship and political representation

in the postwar years have indeed increasingly viewed the interaction between the spheres of politics and popular culture as a relevant area of research. What started with normative accounts of the supposedly negative effects caused by the 'popularization' of politics has recently developed into a field of study dedicated to showing the political relevance of popular culture. Scholars in the field of cultural studies – and the odd historian – have convincingly argued that political and social historians need to take popular culture seriously.

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Hill's approach to sport as a system of meaning also applies to popular culture: it provides an important framework in which people construct identities and experience and try to make sense of the world they live in (Classen, 2010; Nieland, 2004; Street, 1997; Van Zoonen, 2005). By paying attention to popular culture we are, according to Lawrence Black (2010, p. 3), putting 'politics in its wider social setting'. John Street (2004, p. 436) in turn has argued that we should approach the interaction between politics and a massified and pluralized popular culture as 'a legitimate part of the complex ways in which political representation functions in modern democracies'. Political representation in this case refers to the way in which claims to power and to act and speak on behalf of others are articulated (and contested) in the public sphere. The practices and discourses of popular culture form a significant part of the repertoire through which these representative claims were made. Representation, after all, is also a key element of the world of popular culture (Spitaler, 2005).

In *Fever Pitch*, Nick Hornby (2000) described the Arsenal players as 'our representatives, chosen by the manager rather than elected by us, but our representatives nonetheless' (Street, 2004, p. 447). Professional sports people and many other exponents of popular culture act as representatives of their fans, of people who identify with them often to a greater extent than they do with their political representatives. Scholars of cultural studies have argued that this has to do with an emotional divide between the world of politics and that of popular culture. While people experience a gap between themselves and their political representatives, the stars in the world of popular culture, in contrast, are perceived as accessible (Van Zoonen, 2005). Popular culture thus emerges as a communicative space in which politicians are making representative claims and in which political identities are constructed and articulated. Elements of communication that are typically associated with popular culture – looks, emotions, dress, body language, a focus on the private self – therefore need to be taken seriously as crucial elements of *political* communication as well (Street, 2004).

Although some historians have lately developed an interest in the interaction between politics and popular culture, scholars from the disciplines of cultural studies and media and communication science still dominate the field (but see Beers, 2013; Fielding, 2014). A historical approach is, however, needed to overcome the rather presentist bias of the existing body of literature, which locates the interaction between politics and popular culture in more recent decades. Moreover, historical research can improve our understanding of this interaction through contextualization, by linking it with the layout of the political and media landscape and dominant cultural and moral values (Randall, 2010; Street, Inthorn & Scott, 2012; Van Santen, 2012). Such an approach, I would argue, will improve our understanding of how politicians coped with four crucial and closely related criteria of political representation in these decades: visibility, simplicity, authenticity and emotionality (Coleman, 2011; Holtz-Bacha, 2001).

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The French political scientist Bernard Manin (1997) has conceptualized the transformation of political representation in the 1960s and 1970s in parliamentary democracies as a shift from party to audience democracy. He pays particular attention to fundamental changes in the relationship between politicians and the media. Previously, thanks to close connections between political parties and journalists, the media had offered politicians a rather uncritical platform for political communication. In the 1960s this ‘partisan logic’ made way for a far more critical approach (Brants & Van Praag, 2006). The rise of television also allowed for new ways of political communication, bringing politicians straight into the living room of the electorate. It resulted in a personalization of electoral choice: voters did not so much support a political party, but once again first and foremost placed their trust in an individual politician. Parties turned into ‘instruments in the service of [leaders]’ who used media and public relations experts to improve their communication skills and commissioned opinion polls in an effort to tap into concerns on the minds of the electorate (Manin, 1997, p. 219-220). In the 1960s, politicians increasingly had to compete for visibility with other spheres of interest, such as watching an entertainment show on TV, going to the movies or reading a lifestyle or pop magazine. For politicians, entering the arena of popular culture – appearing in illustrated magazines, on TV shows, or rubbing shoulders with sports stars and other icons of popular culture – meant that they enhanced their visibility, particularly among groups of voters for whom politics was (perceived to be) a minor interest, such as young people and women (Classen, 2010; Coleman, 2011; Driessens, 2013).

As a consequence of this visibility, a politician's body became an important element of political communication as well. Popular culture is an arena where the body is cultivated: outward appearances and conceptions of beauty play a key role. This also emerges from the definition of sports as 'an ensemble of knowledges and practices that disciplines, conditions, re-shapes, and inscribes the body' (Cole, 1994, p. 15). This prompts an investigation into political bodies in their literal sense as well – that is, the appearance and physique of politicians – and more generally, in connection with this the construction of manliness and femininity in politics and the gendered nature of political communication. George Mosse (1996), for instance, has argued that the postwar male stereotype was the athletic, clean-cut and physically fit man, a stereotype which the United States exported to Europe through politics, youth culture, and sports. This representation of masculinity turned into political capital in Europe from the 1960s onward, as I will show for the case of the Netherlands. Pierre Bourdieu (1998), in turn, has argued that sport serves as an arena for the expression of masculinity, because of its competitive nature (Spitaler, 2007; Bonde, 2009). This also emerges from the common association between sports and warfare (Burstyn, 1999; Whithead, 2007).

From the perspective of gender studies, politicians who associate themselves with particular male-dominated sports articulate the dominance of masculinity in politics. For instance, when politicians visit a football match, they are expressing their affinity with the common man and simultaneously are confirming the male-dominated nature of politics. Within gender studies, it has been argued that women are often excluded from such 'informal' spheres of politics, that is, from the arenas outside parliament where politics is also articulated (Spitaler, 2007). It was far less complicated for male politicians to develop a connection between their private and public selves and to display their authenticity. By engaging in sports, male politicians could display their 'private' side, show that they were in sync with the popular pleasures of large sections of the population, and tap into a rich reservoir of metaphorical language that enabled them to construct a link between their private and public or political persona. Female politicians, on the other hand, always ran the risk of having to justify how they combined their private roles as wife or mother with their public duties (Van Zoonen, 2006).

Popular culture was also employed by politicians to package politics in such a way that it became more easily to digest. Through the post-war rise of opinion polling, politicians learned that voters were lacking in know-

ledge of political agendas and that the number of floating voters was rapidly expanding (De Jong & Kaal, 2017; Manin, 1997). In the 1950s and 1960s, in many Western democracies, the linkages between class, religion and political identity formation loosened and political constituencies lost much of their communal nature. Against this background, popular culture – with its visual rather than textual orientation – provided the framework for a simplification of politics, for instance by putting the image of a political leader center stage. A focus on political personalities, on the ‘individuality’ of the politician, made politics less abstract, offered voters a new object of identification, and diverted attention away from the fact that differences between political parties were marginal (Manin, 1997).

In addition to visibility and simplicity, authenticity and affective affinity, too, became vital assets for politicians (Beers, 2013; Brants & Voltmer, 2011; Holtz-Bacha, 2001; Street, 2004; Street, 2012). Earlier, political leaders had first and foremost aimed to present themselves as members – and leaders – of a particular constituency united around a shared identity and agenda, and as the sincere and serious defenders of their constituency’s interests (Te Velde, 1999). Trust was built on presenting oneself as the embodiment of a particular political community and its political platform. With the demise of these communities, the trust that underpinned political representation became more personal in nature (Manin, 1997). Trust was based on the correspondence between a politician’s public (‘the politician’) and private persona (‘the person behind the politician’): authentic politicians were those who were ‘representatives of themselves’ (Coleman, 2011, p. 50). For politicians, however, being authentic was quite a challenge given the dominant perception of politics in the 1960s and beyond as being ‘stage managed’, secretive, divisive, old fashioned and static. The world of popular culture and its icons, on the other hand, was perceived as authentic, transparent, and unifying, and was associated with vitality and youthfulness (Spitaler, 2005). Against this background, the (discursive) practices of popular culture became an important stage for politicians to display their authenticity and to construct an affective relationship with the electorate by showing their private selves (Beers, 2013; Holtz-Bacha, 2001). Politicians were keen to create photo opportunities while they engaged in sports or visited a football match, and interviews with or portraits of politicians increasingly discussed their life outside politics, paying particular attention to their engagement in sports, other hobbies and their family life (Kaal, 2018). The next section offers a discussion of how Dutch politicians negotiated their interaction with the worlds of sports in the 1950s

and early 1960s by focusing both on the role professional sports people played in the political sphere and on politicians' participation in sport.

#### SPORT AND POLITICS IN THE 1950S AND EARLY 1960S

222 Dutch political culture in the 1950s centered around the values of hard work, restraint and trust in the ability of the democratically elected representatives to reconstruct the country after the war and work towards an affluent society (Kaal, 2018; Schuyt & Taverne, 2000). Both the mass media and the political elite increasingly identified this as a problem, because they felt that, slowly but surely, politicians and the people had drifted apart. The attendance rate at party meetings was in decline. Newspapers characterized the election campaigns of the 1950s as 'apathetic', 'dull', and 'tamed'.<sup>2</sup> Apparently, (party) politics had become technocratic and had lost its ability to unite voters around a shared sense of belonging (De Rooy, 2014). Politicians particularly worried about political ignorance and feelings of alienation among young people. Sociological research that presented young people as a problematic group with distinct political orientations – the German sociologist Helmut Schelsky (1957) labelled them as a 'skeptical generation' – prompted Dutch political parties to reflect on their approach to young voters (Goudsblom, 1959; Verwey-Jonker, 1960).

From the mid-1950s onward, major parties such as the social democratic *Partij van de Arbeid* (PVD A) and the Catholic *Katholieke Volkspartij* (KVP) made use of media and public relations experts in an attempt to enhance their appeal among the disengaged. The KVP was advised to send their politicians to sporting events or concerts in order to get in touch with the electorate.<sup>3</sup> In another attempt to reconnect with disengaged voters, the parties started to distribute election propaganda in which politics was associated with other spheres of interest that were supposedly more important in their minds. In the campaign for the general elections of 1956, the PVD A published a range of pamphlets in which party leader Willem Drees was compared with a few icons of popular culture, among whom were the Dutch football star Abe Lenstra and the popular American jazz artist Louis Armstrong. One of the pamphlets stressed that Lenstra and Drees had much in common: both were sensible people, team players, but also 'captains', in short: 'men a small country like ours needs'.<sup>4</sup> Both the PVD A and KVP also tapped into class-crossing male pleasures like the Dutch football league, which turned professional in the mid-1950s, in an



## Wie wint de strijd om een plaats in de Ere-divisie?

De Hoofdklassen-competitie nadert het einde. Nog 6 wedstrijden en dan moeten de beslissingen zijn gevallen. Beslissingen in kapitale vragen! In elke afdeling zullen de nummers 1 t/m 8 automatisch promoveren naar de Ere-divisie, die 18 clubs zal bevatten. De beide nrs 9 krijgen nog een kans, omdat zij met de drie kampioenen van de Eerste klassen een promotie-degradatie-competitie zullen spelen om de resterende 2 plaatsen in de Ere-divisie. Hiernaast geven wij de de ranglijsten zoals die

### STAND HOOFDKLASSE A:

	gesp.	punten
Fortuna '54	28	36
Sparta	28	36
N.A.C.	28	36
V.V.V.	28	35
Eindhoven	28	33
Ajax	28	32
D.O.S	28	32
Amsterdam	28	29
N.O.A.D.	28	29
A.D.O.	28	28
Stormvogels	28	28
Limburgia	28	28
Excelsior	28	26
Roda Spart	28	22
Rigtersbleek	28	20
H.V.C.	28	20
Vitesse	27	18
E.B.O.H.	27	15

## De K.V.P. wint in ieder geval de verkiezingsstrijd 1956

er op het ogenblik uitzien. Daarnaast 6 kolommetjes, opdat U zelf, aan de hand van de uitslagen in de komende weken, de nieuwe punten-aantallen achter de diverse clubs kunt invullen. Met dit gemakkelijke kaartje in de hand kunt U zelf en op eenvoudige wijze het verloop van de competitie tot en met de laatste dag bijhouden.

### STAND HOOFDKLASSE B: \*)

	gesp.	punten
Sp.c.l. Enschede	28	41
Elinkwijk	27	40
Willem II	27	36
Rapid J.C.	28	36
P.S.V.	28	35
Feijenoord	28	33
B.V.V.	28	32
Alkmaar	28	31
G.V.A.V.	28	29
D.F.C.	28	28
M.V.V.	27	26
Sittardia	28	26
De Graafschap	28	23
Scheveningen HS	27	22
S.V.V.	28	21
E.D.O.	28	18
De Volewijckers	28	13
Emma	28	10

\*) In deze stand is nog niet begrepen de uitslag van de wedstrijd Scheveningen-Elinkwijk, die bij de stand 2-3 circa 10 minuten voor het einde werd gestaakt.

**Romme spreekt 3 Juni, 3 uur • Ahoy'hal • Toegang vrij**

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Figure 1. Election propaganda cloaked in football talk. Source: Catholic Documentation Center (KDC), KVP Archive, inv.nr. 1488.

attempt to draw the attention of voters. In a pamphlet distributed in the 1956 general election, the PVDA combined information on a match between the teams of G.V.A.V. and Willem II with propaganda for PVDA party leader Willem Drees: 'even if you support G.V.A.V., vote for Willem (of list number) II'.<sup>5</sup> Also in 1956, the KVP distributed a pamphlet that gave a preview of a friendly match between the Netherlands and Ireland and an

overview of the standings in the major Dutch football leagues. The headline read: 'Who will win the league? The KVP will definitely win the elections of 1956' (see Figure 1).<sup>6</sup>

224 One of the first Dutch politicians to cultivate a public image of himself in which sports played a significant role was the young Catholic MP Norbert Schmelzer. Schmelzer developed a keen interest in public relations and marketing in the mid-1950s and urged his party to use this expertise in the election campaigns. Schmelzer set an example by blurring the boundaries between public and private: he had himself filmed for television while he took a walk along the beach, while every newspaper interview discussed his love for judo and he was also often pictured in newspapers and magazines wearing his judo outfit. This all contributed to his image as a striking, talented and strong figure in Dutch politics. The novelty of this instrumentalization of sports for PR purposes is clear from the fact that Schmelzer's appearance triggered a discussion among journalists about the 'image building' of politicians. The English term was used to stress that image building was something foreign to Dutch politics and had been imported from the USA.<sup>7</sup>

Such a repertoire of political communication was also open to female politicians, as the example of the liberal MP Haya van Someren-Downer makes clear (Kaal, 2018). She entered parliament in 1959 and acted as chairwoman of the liberal party between 1969 and 1975. In a world of politics dominated by men and (to a far smaller extent) by women who either tried to go along with the dominant, masculine political culture or kept to the stereotypical female role in politics by focusing on 'soft' issues such as health and education, Van Someren stood out for her striking appearance. Haya – she was one of the first politicians to be commonly referred to by only her first name – was an eye-catching woman who knew how to use media attention to her own advantage. Her previous employer, the popular daily newspaper *De Telegraaf*, frequently published articles about Van Someren's public and private activities, including her exploits as a judoka.<sup>8</sup> Van Someren's eye for PR also included Parliament. After the famous Dutch judoka Anton Geesink had won the world title in 1961, becoming the first non-Japanese world champion, Van Someren urged the government to do more than merely send him a telegram and to pay Geesink the respect he deserved. Later on, she also made the case for more sports broadcasting on TV.<sup>9</sup> These examples show that even in the early 1960s, some politicians acknowledged the potential of sport to cultivate a particular image and to convey that they were in sync with the times.

SPORT AND POLITICS IN THE 1970S: THE RISE OF  
A CELEBRITY CULTURE

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the restraint that had characterized the emotional culture of Dutch politics in the early postwar decades gradually made way for a more expressive culture. The interaction between politics and popular culture played its part in bringing about this transformation. This interaction also contributed to the rise of a celebrity culture in politics, which operated in both directions: celebrities from the world of popular culture entered the political stage and politicians themselves turned into celebrities as well. The leaders of the three major parties: the social-democrat Joop den Uyl (PVD A), the Christian Democrat Dries van Agt and his successor Ruud Lubbers (CDA) and the leader of the liberal party Hans Wiegel, also known as 'Joop, Dries, Ruud and Hans', all to different extents knew how to navigate the popularization of politics.

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In the 1970s almost all of the major parties followed the example set by Van Someren and recognized the potential of associating themselves with the victories of Dutch sport stars. In the 1960s and 1970s there was a lot to celebrate. In 1968, Jan Jansen won the Tour de France. Politicians eagerly issued press releases stating that they had sent out a congratulatory telegram, which in one case resulted in a dispute because an orthodox-Protestant politician had mailed his telegram on a Sunday.<sup>10</sup> In the early 1970s, football club Ajax won the European Cup three years in a row and the Dutch national football team reached the final of the World Cup in both 1974 and 1978 (losing both times). In 1974, the prime minister Den Uyl invited the players to a party in the grounds of his official residence. The public was treated to scenes that had been unimaginable before. Members of government were seen dancing and singing with the players (Van den Broek, 2002).<sup>11</sup> Apparently the codes of conduct had changed to such an extent that politicians felt free to behave like supporters.

This demonstrated that politicians were eager to tap into the popularity of sports. In election campaigns, parties competed for the most attractive time slots to broadcast their campaign commercials: the half-time break in football matches which would ensure them high viewer ratings. Moreover, in 1977 the parties made sure that the televised election debate would not be scheduled at the same time as an important football match on the other channel.<sup>12</sup> Sport stars also increasingly popped up in the election campaigns of the major parties. In 1981 a campaign strategist (and former journalist) described sports people as 'opinion leaders' and urged the so-

cial democrats to use them to appeal to particular voter groups such as young people and others that were perceived to be less interested in politics. One way to do so was by campaign commercials which showed sport highlights followed by short statements of sports people on their political preferences.<sup>13</sup>

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In fact, this strategist was stating the obvious. All major parties already seemed aware that by associating themselves with sporting stars they could boost their party's image. In 1972 the social democrats campaigned with pamphlets in which famous Dutch actors, sports people and other celebrities expressed their support for the PVD.A. Feyenoord star Willem van Hanegem was one of them. He himself had a working-class background and he played for a club in the port city of Rotterdam which had a strong working-class supporter base, making him a very credible standard bearer for the social democratic party. In other cases this was less obvious: the legendary sport journalist Theo Koomen made reference to famous Dutch footballing left-wingers in order to express his support for left-wing politics.<sup>14</sup> In the 1977 and 1981 election campaigns artists and sports people, among them Van Hanegem and his wife, decathlete Eef Kamerbeek and speed skater Jeen van den Berg, joined a campaign bus that travelled around the country. To attract people to campaign events, voters were invited to kick a ball with Van Hanegem.<sup>15</sup> Parties also repeatedly organized football matches between a team of politicians and a team of celebrities, which ensured them of plenty of media coverage (see Figure 2).<sup>16</sup> The social democrats, however, also reflected on the need to carefully balance entertainment and politics. Too much entertainment, they feared, would make it seem as if they were trivializing politics. Quotes from people like Van Hanegem in party propaganda therefore often contained references to specific elements of the party's political agenda that supposedly attracted them to the party.

A rather new phenomenon in the 1970s and 1980s was that of politicians who themselves actively engaged in sports. Against the background of the personalization of politics, sport harbored important values and attitudes with which politicians were eager to associate themselves, such as vitality, youthfulness and a winner's instinct. It also gave them the opportunity to display their private selves – the politician as a 'human being' – and to develop a link between their private and political personas.<sup>17</sup>

A fine example of a politician who used sport to build a particular image is Dries van Agt. In the 1970s Van Agt cultivated his love for cycling both by cycling himself and by mixing with the famous road racers of the



*Figure 2. Politicians from the Christian Democratic Appeal party are about to play a match against a team of celebrities from the world of television and entertainment. The event was part of the 1981 general election campaign. Photographer: Marcel Antonisse, Nationaal Archief / Anefo, CCo.*

day. Firstly, this enabled him to associate himself with success. Van Agt repeatedly appeared at cycling events, celebrating the victories of stars like Joop Zoetemelk (who won the Tour de France in 1980), Gerrie Knetemann and Jan Raas.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, since cyclists and their supporters predominantly had working-class backgrounds, his love for cycling enabled Van Agt to show that he was in sync with ‘the man in the street’. Thirdly, cycling supplied a distinctive language and metaphorical landscape that allowed Van Agt and those commenting on his life as a politician to narrate his political activities in new ways. Van Agt himself compared the Tour de France with his own life as a politician, which had also been a ‘track with lots of hills and mountains’. He drew parallels between himself as a politician and road racers by stressing his ‘perseverance’, and the need to be ‘mentally’ strong. In the media and in Parliament itself the Van Agt ministry was repeatedly referred to as the ‘equipe Van Agt’ with Van Agt riding in the yellow jersey, and his battle with his main adversary, social democratic leader Joop den Uyl was also discussed through the language of cycling.<sup>19</sup> Fourthly, by ap-

pearing at and participating in cycling events, Van Agt created plenty of photo opportunities, which ensured him coverage on the pages of a range of sports magazines and other popular publications.<sup>20</sup> In the 1970s Van Agt's cycling activities even turned into a mini-craze. Journalists published several books on Van Agt and cycling, among which was a comic book that represented his life as a cycling race (Bruijnesteijn, 1981). Although some journalists questioned the sincerity of his love for cycling, the road racers themselves showed their appreciation by endorsing Van Agt with campaign advertisements in which they characterized him as 'sympathetic, trustworthy and a "good sport"'.<sup>21</sup>

228 Other politicians followed Van Agt's example. In the early 1980s the new, young leader of the liberal party, Ed Nijpels, also cultivated an interest in cycling.<sup>22</sup> Jan Terlouw, leader of the socio-liberal party D'66, was pictured in popular magazines on his sailing boat or in his tennis outfit.<sup>23</sup> Ruud Lubbers, a young cabinet member in the 1970s and the successor to Van Agt as leader of the Christian Democrats in 1982, seized every opportunity to display his skills as a field hockey player and to draw parallels between these skills and his political talents: he once described himself as a man who worked hard and covered a lot of ground.<sup>24</sup> In 1989, Lubbers, who was about to enter his third term as prime minister, was still eager to display his fitness: on the day of the elections, the popular daily paper *De Telegraaf* published a picture of Lubbers jogging through the park on its front page, which suggested that he was still fit for the job.<sup>25</sup>

#### A LANGUAGE OF SPORTS

As the previous section has shown, politicians used sports metaphors to develop a link between their engagement in sport and their political activities. This was part of a larger trend in the 1960s and 1970s which saw the proliferation of the use of sport metaphors in political discourse. Metaphors are important in political communication because they allow us to understand an abstract entity in terms of another entity to which we can relate more easily. Structuring one domain in terms of another can influence the way in which large numbers of people conceive of sensitive and controversial aspects of the reality they live in. Sport metaphors are excellent examples of this. They have often been deconstructed as tools that are used to cloud judgement by reducing complex political issues to simple formulations, and in this way preventing the public from having a clear view of

the real issue at hand. The use of sport language in politics is, however, not just the result of a carefully planned populist strategy: it is also the expression of a new mentality. The German political historian Thomas Mergel (2002, p. 599) even sees it as a 'civilization' of politics since in earlier times warfare had played the role now played by sports in describing the world of politics. This makes it worthwhile to explore what impact sport metaphors have had on politics and on our understanding and reading of it.

One obvious aspect of sport metaphors is that they facilitate the understanding of politics as a battle between opposing sides. It is therefore not very surprising that they were increasingly used in the Netherlands from the 1960s onward, when a culture of postwar consensus in Dutch politics came to an end and was replaced by a politics of polarization. Within the PVDa, a younger generation of politicians urged for renewal and pushed the party toward a more confrontational stance. This new antagonism was aimed at forcing the three major confessional parties to give up their position in the political center and to join either the progressive or the conservative side in Parliament. When in 1973 the left-wing government of prime minister Joop den Uyl started its term, a social-democratic MP used a football metaphor to sketch the future. He characterized the government's four year term as a 'competition' in which the government would play several matches against its opponents.<sup>26</sup> Such metaphors in essence obscured the fact that in Dutch politics winning and losing was not really as straightforward as the language of sport might suggest: parties had no other option than to form coalition governments, and the party that had 'won' the elections did not necessarily end up in government.

Another key feature of the language of sports that was easily transferable to the world of politics was a discussion of the 'rules of the game'. Politicians and journalists often compared politics to a 'game' or 'match' that was guided by an established set of rules.<sup>27</sup> This metaphor was employed repeatedly because these rules became open for discussion from the late 1960s onwards. When the Amsterdam student movement occupied the head office of the University of Amsterdam in 1969, MPs discussed this in football terms as 'offside' and warned that parliamentary democracy would be in danger if people did not adhere to the rules. The 'offside' metaphor was indeed often used to argue that certain activities or arguments of political opponents were out of order.<sup>28</sup> As one might expect, the Speaker was often referred to in this context as the 'referee'.<sup>29</sup>

Sporting metaphors also emerged as a result of changes in the media landscape. In the 1960s it was not uncommon that reporters who had

made a name for themselves in the world of sports journalism made a crossover to politics. In doing so, they took the world of sports with them as a sphere of reference and a metaphorical landscape, as in the work of the famous Dutch journalist Nico Scheepmaker.<sup>30</sup> Simultaneously, from the late 1960s onward, sport was taken more and more seriously by established, well-regarded opinion magazines. Their reports on sport appeared side by side with pieces covering their traditional spheres of interest: politics and high culture.<sup>31</sup> Simultaneously, sporting metaphors began to appear in the political sections of magazines and newspapers.<sup>32</sup> This was also stimulated by the introduction of new formats, such as the televised election debates, which were narrated in the press in terms of a boxing, fencing or football match.<sup>33</sup>

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Sport metaphors did not remain uncontested. They were also turned against politicians, for instance by labelling them as 'vedettes' – a concept with a double meaning that both referred to sports people as 'sport stars' as well as to people who 'behaved like a star', that is, whose behavior was too self-assured, and who were not open to criticism on their leadership and so perceived themselves to be 'unassailable'.<sup>34</sup> Framing politics in terms of sports was also criticized because it often placed voters in the position of a passive audience, rather than presenting them as engaged citizens who were supposed to play an active role in the political sphere themselves.<sup>35</sup>

#### THE INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF SPORT: SPORT AND POLICY-MAKING SINCE THE 1960S

This contribution has aimed to show how a focus on the interaction between sport and politics might improve our understanding of changes in political culture in the postwar years. Based on a case study of the Netherlands, I have discussed how sport and popular culture more generally acted as a platform and semiotic reservoir that politicians sought to use to present themselves to the people and gain popular support against the background of the emerging audience democracy in Western parliamentary democracies. This is of course only one element of the bigger history of the interplay between sport and politics. One other aspect that deserves more scholarly attention is the instrumentalization of sport in, and beyond, the field of policy making and I would like to end this contribution by briefly making the case for historical research on this topic.



# WEG MET DE BUIKJES EN DE SLAPPE SPIEREN

*Alle experts zijn het erover eens, en de nuchtere feiten wijzen het uit: wij zijn een bewegingsarm volk, we eten te veel, nemen er te veel ons gemak van, we zitten te veel en gebruiken onze spieren te weinig. Vandaar ontstellend veel slappespierde rekruten, akelig veel dikke buikjes, bangstigend veel hartinfarcten. Daar moet iets aan gedaan worden. Telekleur wekt alle lezers op tot een massale gezondheidsactie, daarbij gesteund door niet alleen de Nederlandse Sportfederatie, maar vooral ook door het goede voorbeeld van onze ministers en staatssecretarissen die de daad bij het woord hebben gevoegd en u voorstaan in uw goede voornemen. Telekleur roep u toe: Doe als zij — ga iedere dag even lopen, fietsen, zwemmen, het geeft niet wát ... maar **DOE IETS AAN UW CONDITIE!***

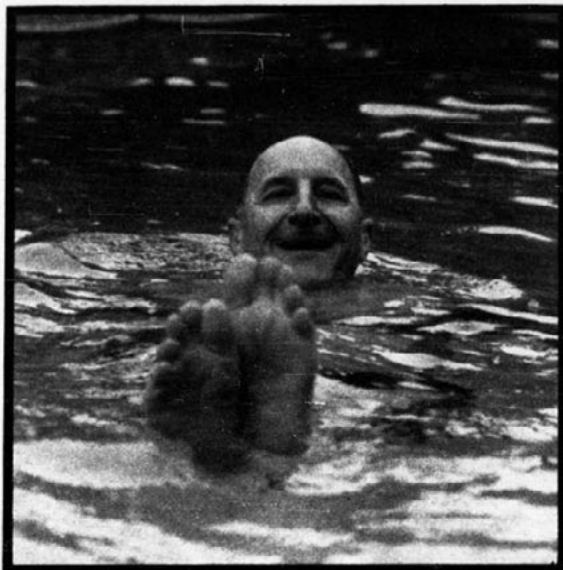


Foto voorpagina (evenals alle overige foto's bij deze reportage gemaakt door onze fotograaf Ruud van der Linden): minister Luns houdt in het zwembad zijn conditie op peil.

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*Figure 3. In a special section of the popular daily newspaper De Telegraaf, members of the Dutch government call upon the Dutch people to engage in sports in order to improve their health, 18 August 1969.*

The instrumentalization of sport refers to the ways in which people have used the field of sport to attain specific goals in other spheres of life. From the 1960s onward, sport turned into a policy area of the Dutch national government. Against the background of rising levels of affluence and the advent of a post-industrial society, which led to an increasing number of people in sedentary occupations, sport became linked up with welfare policy. Recreational sport was instrumental to offering citizens a healthy, communal and useful form of leisure (see Figure 3). This recreational approach to sport remained dominant throughout the 1970s. In the 1980s, the instrumentalization of sport by the national government moved into the direction of social cohesion. Sport served to stimulate the integration

into society of minority groups, ranging from people with a disability to the elderly. Policy making also started to touch upon the field of elite sport. Government-sponsored grant schemes contributed the development of elite sport in the Netherlands, which was also boosted by the emergence of commercial sponsors and broadcasters. In the 1990, sport became connected to a growing range of policy areas, from development aid to environmental policy.

232 Over the decades policy makers have projected onto the field of sport their hopes and dreams for a healthy, more inclusive and participatory society, often treating sport as the panacea for a broad range of social ills (Van Bottenburg, 2002). This issue is at the heart of sport sociology and, in the context of the Netherlands, has been discussed in depth by Ramon Spaaij (2014; 2015), and Maarten van Bottenburg et al. (2015). They have shown that mechanisms of exclusion are also at play in the field of sport through a range of discourses and practices that side-line people along lines of class, religion, race, gender and ability, among others. After all, treating sport as a sphere for the creation of a sense of belonging and the construction of identities necessarily means that 'out-groups' are constructed as well: not everybody feels at home in the field of sports. However, we still need to know more about changes and shifts in the instrumentalization of sport throughout the postwar years. What were the hopes, dreams, and visions that were projected onto the field of sport, and how did these develop in the second half of the century? How, by whom, and to what ends has sport been instrumentalized, and what were the consequences in terms of the inclusion or exclusion of particular groups of people and the construction and maintenance of social hierarchies? Such research could serve to question ahistorical, stable definitions of 'sport' and 'politics' and their mutual relationship and should therefore place the power struggle over the definition and boundaries of the field of sport and its interaction with other fields at the heart of the investigation. It is up to historians to take up the gauntlet.

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