

## PRINTED MEDIA AND BRAZILIAN WATER POLO: THE MYTH OF ALADAR SZABO

*A MÍDIA IMPRESSA E O POLO AQUÁTICO BRASILEIRO: O MITO DE ALADAR SZABO*

*LOS MEDIOS IMPRESOS Y EL POLO ACUÁTICO BRASILEÑO: EL MITO DE ALADAR SZABO*

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**Keywords:**  
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**Abstract:** This article looks into the view of printed media on Hungarian-born Brazilian-naturalized water polo player Aladar Szabo and also on water polo itself in the 1960s. We sought to identify how media relationships contributed to consolidate the mythical player's image, how sport-related occurrences were narrated, and how printed media participated in the construction of Szabo's image and its relation with the myth of masculinity. Methodologically speaking, we combined documental and bibliographical research. We found the construction of a violent image of the sport, bringing together facts about the player and his attitudes with the myth of masculinity.

**Palabras chave:**  
Esportes.  
História.  
Mito da masculinidade.

**Resumo:** Este artigo objetiva analisar a visão da mídia impressa sobre um jogador de polo aquático brasileiro, o húngaro naturalizado Aladar Szabo, e também sobre o polo aquático nos anos 1960. Buscamos identificar como os relatos midiáticos contribuíram para a consolidação da imagem do jogador-mito, como eram relatados os acontecimentos sobre o esporte e ainda de que forma a mídia impressa participou da construção de sua imagem e sua relação com o mito da masculinidade. Metodologicamente, combinamos pesquisa documental e bibliográfica. Verificou-se construção de uma imagem violenta do esporte, aproximando as atitudes e fatos do jogador com o mito da masculinidade.

**Palabras clave:**  
Deportes.  
Historia.  
Mito de la masculinidad.

**Resumen:** Este artículo se propone analizar la visión de los medios impresos sobre un jugador de polo acuático brasileño, el húngaro naturalizado Aladar Szabo, y también sobre el polo acuático en los años 1960. Buscamos identificar cómo los relatos hechos por los medios contribuyeron a la consolidación de la imagen del jugador-mito, saber cómo eran relatados los acontecimientos sobre el deporte y de qué forma los medios impresos participaron en la construcción de su imagen y su relación con el mito de la masculinidad. Metodológicamente, combinamos la investigación documental con la bibliográfica. Se constató la construcción de una imagen violenta del deporte, aproximando las actitudes y hechos del jugador al mito de la masculinidad.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Brazilian water polo has won a number of South American titles and one Pan American title, participated in seven editions of the Olympic Games, and followed a regular schedule of regional, national and international competitions. However, it has neither become a mass sport nor achieved a significant number of participants or spectators in the country.

It began to be practiced in Rio de Janeiro in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century by rowers from clubs like Flamengo, Boqueirão do Passeio, Natação e Regatas, Guanabara, and Vasco da Gama. Since those athletes were quite corpulent and swimming was not their main sport, they used their strength to free themselves from their opponents, generating a certain degree of aggressiveness. The rules allowed almost everything in order to reach the goal, which was achieved when players got to put the ball into one of the boats also used for regattas, which were positioned at the ends of the field. The goalkeeper stayed on top of them to jump on attackers and try to steal the ball. The image that remained of the sport practiced by those rowers was that playing water polo meant being virile, strong, tough and quarrelsome – attributes related to the myth of masculinity (TELLES, 2002).

We focus on the figure of Aladar Szabo, considered the best player of the 1960s and, for many, Brazil's water polo icon. His characteristics, or those ascribed to him, were key to echo the water polo stereotype. The athlete who contributed to the construction of that image still draws attention for his career today. Project "Memory of Brazilian Olympic Sport" included in its 2013 competition the production called "*Szabo! Em busca do Gol*" (Szabo! In pursuit of the Goal), which premiered on December 20, 2014 on ESPN Brazil. The documentary film, through numerous interviews with players with whom Szabo worked at the time, presents the image of an outstanding and very violent player who used his large physical size to overwhelm his opponents (INDIANA PRODUÇÕES CINEMATOGRAFICAS, 2013).

The increasing development of the media has exercised and continues to exercise influence in the ways of life and opinion making in modern society. In the case of water polo, the media contributed to build its violent image. As a recent example, the sixth season of TV soap opera *Malhação* included a water polo team formed by aggressive young men who were always in trouble (TELLES, 2009).

For a sport to develop and remain in a country's sporting landscape, the support of their organizing bodies is essential, such as confederations and federations. However, the media also plays a decisive role in exposure. The more people come into contact with a sport, the more likely it is to increase its number of practitioners, thus enhancing the possibilities for athletes to appear, which facilitates the emergence of good results and idols – which are important for society to identify with that sport.

The 1960s are regarded as the golden years of Brazilian water polo. The country took part in three Olympic Games, won its only Pan-American title in 1963, in São Paulo, and had an idol: Aladar Szabo. None of these situations has been repeated in the history of the sport, not even alone. The three aforementioned factors drew the attention of the print media of the time, which helped to spread the sport and its idol.

Therefore, the overall goal of this study is to analyze the view of print media on water polo and Aladar Szabo in the 1960s. Our specific objectives were to identify/reveal: i) how print

media articles contributed to consolidate the image of the myth Aladar Szabo; ii) how print media reported the events related to that sport and to Aladar Szabo; iii) the participation of print media in building the image of that water polo player and its relation to the myth of masculinity.

## 2 METHOD

Veyne (1998) explains that an event only has meaning within a series, and the number of series is undefined since they do not follow a geometric pattern in which logic serves to definitely clarify what happened. History entails inaccessible limit, it is subjective and reflects the projection of our values onto the answers to the questions we decide to ask. Describing all historical facts would be impossible, since a path must be chosen and it cannot go everywhere. We also believe that none of those paths is the only one or the right one and much less that it reflects on history a whole. History lies in the whole of the information at the crossroads of the possible itineraries and especially the objectives proposed. Thus, it is a historical research in which the temporal/spatial period specified sets the field, the size and even the definition in which the study develops.

Aiming to clarify, expand and/or modify concepts or ideas on the subject, this is an exploratory study (GIL, 1999) mainly because it has few approaches in the academic field and for being part of the history of Brazilian water polo. Given the above, our line of action is document analysis associated with a literature review as the main strategy (and database) in search for answers to the proposed objectives.

Although such names are similar, methods differ in the genesis of their sources. Therefore, the literature review presents secondary sources such as books, journals/periodicals, laws, congress proceedings, scientific articles, theses, dissertations, etc. On the other hand, document research uses specific materials such as databases, interviews, reports, letters, photos, newspaper articles, audio recordings, videos, websites, slides or other documents that have not yet received analytical treatment, always directed to provide evidence and/or justifications to support the proposed research (SÁ-SILVA; ALMEIDA; GUINDANI, 2009).

Thus, under the principles of Sá-Silva, Almeida and Guindani (2009), we categorized and classified the material, delimiting it from 1959 – Aladar Szabo's arrival to Brazil – to his participation in the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo<sup>1</sup>.

As shown in Chart 1:

Table 1 – Bibliographic sources and materials

Category	Type	Number
Bibliographical Sources	Articles	3
	Book Chapters	2
	Dissertation	1
Documents	Books	8
	Total	14
	Film/Documentary	2
	Articles in newspaper O Globo	7

<sup>1</sup> During the study we used some information from prior periods, such as events that occurred in the 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles and 1956 in Melbourne, which contributed to ratify the hypothesis about the construction of the image of water polo player in Brazil.

Articles in newspaper Jornal dos Sports	7
Articles in newspaper Jornal do Brasil	2
Articles in newspaper Correio da Manhã	2
Articles in newspaper A Gazeta Esportiva	1
Articles in newspaper Diário de São Paulo	1
Articles in newspaper Diário da Noite	1
Articles in newspaper Jornal da Tarde	1
Articles in magazine Revista do Esporte	1
Articles of unknown origin	1
IOC documents	1
FARJ documents	3
Total	311

Source: Prepared by the author

It is worth noting that some of those documents were provided by the Szabo family during a visit paid to them by the researchers. Some newspapers were provided by former players of clubs from Rio de Janeiro (Fluminense Football Club, Clube de Regatas Guanabara, Botafogo de Futebol e Regatas) who lived the period selected for the study. Considering the nature and conservation of the source, some of the newspapers had no page number, date, or even name.

To discuss and assist in understanding the concept of masculinity, we used the studies of Almeida (1995), Gastaldo and Braga (2011), Rial (2000), and Nolasco (1995a, 1995b, 2001), which were important to unveil players' conducts that reflected a stereotype and key to maintain the identity characteristic of the water polo group.

### 3 ALADAR SZABO

The son of a military officer and a housewife, Aladar Szabo was born on 15 March 1933 in Hungary and, as many young people of that time, he suffered family pressures about his future. His father wanted him to be a priest and his mother, a pianist. However, over time the young Szabo developed an increasing interest in the pools rather than in his parents' wishes. At 17 he ceased to attend seminar and his piano lessons, but he won the title and broke the European youth record for 100-meter freestyle swimming, besides being a member of the Hungarian 4x100 relay swimming team. Playing water polo in his team – Vasas – since he was 15, Szabo fell in love with the sport and in 1952, due to his powerful shots, he was called to practice with the Hungarian national team (A VIOLENTA..., 1972: p. 4).

When he left Hungary in 1956 due to political problems in his country, Szabo fled to Italy where he found a thriving water polo scene. The country had won gold medal at the 1948 London Olympics and would be the Olympic champion again in Rome in 1960.

In Italy, his performance in the 1957/58 season, playing for Naples's team Rari Nantes, generated proposals to play in other countries, including Brazil, which had been in contact with the Hungarian player in the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki (VINICIUS... 1959, p. 5). In this context, the newspaper's narrative is ratified by Telles (2009), when he says that João Havelange, former

members of Brazil's national water polo team, brokered Szabo's transfer to Brazil due to the fame of the Hungarian player.

To newspaper *O Globo* (VINICIUS... 1959, p. 5), Szabo said that in addition to Brazil, he had received invitations to join teams in Greece, India and Tunisia. But his friends Vinícios and Del Vecchio, who played for the Napole football team, used to say so many wonders of the natural beauties of Brazil and their wonderful women that Szabo chose to accept their advice. In addition to these factors, an Italian law prohibited foreigners from participating in local teams. Since getting a new visa or naturalization would take long, Szabo decided to come to Brazil.

### 3.1 Szabo and his trajectory in Brazilian water polo

Upon his arrival in Brazil in 1959, Szabo would work as a water polo coach for Fluminense. However, since he was still in good physical shape, he played for the club in 1959-61 and helped it to dominate Rio pools, with a record of 104 matches without losing between 1952 and 1961 (NETTO, 1969).

When Szabo left Fluminense, he was transferred to Botafogo on September 10, 1961. On the match between the two clubs on October 21 of the same year, he scored the two goals that gave victory to Botafogo. Fluminense lost its record of almost ten years and ended up leaving the match (WATER-POLO... 1961, p. 6), which was ended prematurely with fights and confusion after Fluminense players left the pool feeling wronged by referee Almerídio Brandão. However, despite its defeat, Fluminense won Rio's 1961 championship. This historic match was covered in many newspaper stories at the time. In the headline "Botafogo broke Fluminense's invincibility: game not over" – *Correio da Manhã*, 1961, the newspaper reports the confusion that happened in the pool of Clube de Regatas Guanabara. Chairs and tables were hurled by fans and athletes, causing the end of the match (BOTAFOGO..., 1961).

On October 23, 1961, *Jornal dos Sports's* article "Hot weather at Clube Guanabara" displayed photos of the fight (87 PARTIDAS, 1961). On October 22, 1961, *O Globo* enthusiastically reported Fluminense's defeat by Botafogo under the headline "Sensational victory". The newspaper emphasized the brilliant performance of the black-and-white team and announced a new reign in the pools (VITÓRIA..., 1961).

On October 23, 1961 *Última Hora's* headline "Water-Polo: 2 x 0 – Botafogo ended Fluminense's reign" (WATER-POLO..., 1961) and *O Globo's* "Fluminense's first defeat in nine years" (PRIMEIRA..., 1961) placed more emphasis on the end of Fluminense's winning streak than on the fight itself, and did not fail to point out Aladar Szabo's two-goal beautiful performance.

Two issues are widely discussed about that event. The first one is the defeat of Fluminense, which had not lost for nearly a decade; the second one was the power of the idol who, by going from Fluminense to Botafogo was decisive in breaking the record, giving that match violent, dramatic and historical colors, thus attracting the press and publicizing the sport and Szabo himself.

Water Polo had a considerable space in print media. We found many articles with photos in the collections of Szabos' family and former players, showing its importance at the time, with special focus on the Fluminense.

- "Fluminense tries fifth championship"– *Jornal dos Sports* [1957].
- "Fluminense F. C. undefeated Champion with 86 matches"– [1960].

- “Unbeaten for 86 matches” *Jornal dos Sports* – [1960].
- “Fluminense champion for the ninth time” *O Globo* – [1961].
- “87 unbeaten matches” *Jornal dos Sports* [1960].
- “Fluminense has completed 91 unbeaten games” *Jornal dos Sports* [1960].
- “Fluminense will try tomorrow its 100<sup>th</sup> match unbeaten” *Jornal dos Sports* [1961].
- “Fluminense unbeaten in 101 games and five-time winner of the Rio-São Paulo Championship” *O Globo* – [Sept, 1961].

On November 27, 1962, *A Gazeta Esportiva* reported Szabo's victory in an individual tournament of fundamentals. In that competition, players from Esporte Clube Pinheiros, Clube Atlético Paulistano, Clube Tietê and Botafogo Futebol e Regatas faced off in five events: 50 meters with the ball, power pitch, pitch, precision pitch, penalty shoot, and a 10x50 relay race. Szabo won three of the four individual events and finished third in precision pitch; Botafogo won in relay. In the final count, Szabo scored 40.8 points, more than twice the second place Farid Zablith from Clube Paulistano, who scored 16 points. This article shows how Szabo was in a better technical condition than Brazilian players, easily winning almost all disputes (POLO AQUÁTICO, 1962).

The peak of Szabo's career in Brazil happened when he was called to join the national team in the Pan American Games 1963 in Sao Paulo and the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.<sup>2</sup> The presence of the Hungarian player brought hopes that Brazil could win the Pan American Games, which had been shared by the US and Argentina in 1951 (TELLES, 2005). As top scorer with 24 goals, he was the main player of the Brazilian team that won the gold medal. This competition was the first to be organized by the International Olympic Committee in Brazil and had significant repercussion.

On April 30, 1963, *Diário de São Paulo* reported that the matches in Palmeiras' pool were crowded, which further contributed to spread water polo and the name of its main player (O BRASIL, 1963). On December 24 of the same year, Aladar Szabo was elected the best Brazilian water polo player by *O Globo* (O GLOBO..., 1963).

With the presence of Szabo, a good performance was expected in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. However, even with him, the Brazilian team did not go beyond the first stage of the competition, as had happened four years earlier at the Rome Olympics (COMITÊ OLÍMPICO INTERNACIONAL, 1964... SZABO, 2014).

#### 4 BRAZILIAN WATER POLO AND THE MYTH OF MASCULINITY

A remarkable fact in the history of Brazilian water polo helps to ratify the construction of the violent image in 1932 during the Los Angeles Olympic Games. It was the second Brazilian participation in the Games and, after losing to Germany, the Brazilian team left the

<sup>2</sup> Szabo came to Brazil in 1959, but his attempt at naturalization was unsuccessful, which prevented him from participating in the 1960 Olympics in Rome.

pool and assaulted referee Bela Conjadi, being excluded from the games (COMITÊ OLÍMPICO INTERNACIONAL, 1932). That caused water polo's discredit with the Brazilian Sports Confederation (CBD). Without the organization's support, water polo was out of international competitions (TELLES, 2002).

Despite being a contact sport, the rules do not provide for any kind of violence, either above the water or under it, thus having the same principles of other sports such as handball and football. What happens is that the awareness of being beaten without the referee noticing it creates the possibility for retaliation under the same conditions, and playing underwater makes the referee's task much more difficult.

Rial (2000) already pointed an intrinsic relationship between masculinity, resilience and pain in sport. The author explains that some sports necessary include learning about incorporating a form of masculinity. Therefore, boys learn to be active and relatively aggressive through the inculcation of attitudes that echo a concept of "real man".

Olympic sports, even with Coubertin's advanced ideas idealizing a worldwide competition based on peace and equality, did not encourage female participation. In the first Olympic Games of the modern era, which took place in 1896 in Athens, women were not allowed; they only started participating in the second edition in Paris. Women were not 20% until 1972 in the Montreal Olympics and they did not reach 30% until 1992, showing male supremacy in modern sport. However, they were 42% in Beijing 2008 and 44% in London in 2012, showing a close balance between male and female participation (COMITÊ OLÍMPICO INTERNACIONAL 2012).

In water polo, that gender balance did not follow the trend throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Female participation in that sport came only 100 years after the first men's Olympic competition in Paris in 1900. Only at the Sydney Olympics, in 2000, did the sport include women. The Australian team won the first Olympic champion by winning the US team.

Women face resistance to practice certain sports such as football, rugby and water polo itself. Stereotypes and prejudice, even if attenuated, still remain alive in our thoughts. The female version of the sport began to be practiced late in Brazil, in 1986 at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and in São Paulo, at Clube Atlético Paulistano (TELLES, 2002).

That said, Almeida (1995) shows asymmetry between genders, where they are distinguished through some sort of hierarchy as something classificatory that ascribes meaning to people, objects, activities, etc. That construct serves as background to the domination of one over the other, thus legitimizing spaces, conducts and even sports as more masculine and less feminine or vice versa.

Rial (2000) states that the presence of women alone will not immediately de-masculinize sporting spaces, therefore not representing feminization. The author explains that the woman would eventually be contaminated by the masculine. However, just as occurred with volleyball, football and many other sports, the presence of women in those areas caused the sports to lose their gender character, being no longer marks of masculinity.

The presence of basketball players in magazines like Playboy, photos of football players in sexy poses, such as those published in *Placar* magazine or national newspapers, show that inhabiting those fields previously seen as masculine do not necessarily contaminate women with the masculine in the eyes of society (RIAL, 2000, p. 253).

For Nolasco (2001), masculinity can be sought in several ways. In warrior societies, physical vigor was always related to strength; its continued use, excess and damage were seen as references of a man's value. Discipline and courage were linked to those attributes. In a man's daily life, the tension levels he experiences are converted into requirements that, if left unchecked, may lead him to seek more and more ways to drain them. Boys are always asked to display physical strength, to be leaders and to be ready to live alone. When they grow up, they come to believe that tension is inherent in a man's lifestyle and that aggression and violence are the best way to express it.

Almeida (1995) also stresses that masculinity pervades a hegemonic model in society, in which being a man often means proving one's courage and vigor from attitudes and behaviors experienced, accepting and overcoming challenges such as the simple confrontation between boys. Thus, Gastaldo and Braga (2011) show that acquiring a male identity in our society is linked to competitiveness awakened in childhood, when social pressures start by the assertion of "being a man".

These statements are related to the typical sports clashes, starting in sports schools and basic categories, where the dispute for victory is based on subjecting one's opponent. In water polo, for example, since one starts in it, the struggle for space in the water makes the dispute for the ball even more intense, requiring an excellent physical form both to support the opponent's advance and to keep one's head above water.

Gastaldo and Braga underscore the *versus*, the fight and the competitiveness in the male field:

The practice of contests and competitions can be considered a widespread feature of the male ethos, as a recurrent research topic in the humanities. In several cultures, the social assertion of 'being a man' entails dispute with other men, whether in the most direct way of close combat or by more subtle means such as verbal challenges, insult tournaments or cockfight bets (GASTALDO, BRAGA, 2011, p 880.).

According to Nolasco (1995a), traditional standards consolidated by the patriarchal model always require a confrontational relationship: one attacks, the other defends; someone wins, someone else loses. This perspective on the relationship establishes an intrinsic approximation to competitiveness, thus creating the belief that combative and aggressive attitudes are typical of men.

We agree with Rial (2000) when she shows that the masculinities built in sports differs according to the sport practiced. In boxing or rugby, a specific ethos represents both the historical construction of the sport and athletes' physical characteristics. Therefore, being manly in water polo may or may not include the same attitudes in athletics, but virility is a marker to be followed in sports with highly masculinized histories.

Therefore, being strong, virile and "manly" are features appreciated for a player to build his identity more easily and achieve his goals within the sport. In this sense, we can infer that there is a close relationship between water polo and the myth of masculinity as defined by Nolasco (1995a).

## 5 THE MEDIA AND CONSTRUCTION OF MYTH

Szabo's performance as a player, commented by the media, is related to the characteristics pointed out here about masculinity that helped to create/maintain the stereotype

of the “water polo player”. In this part of the study, we will see how these representations fit Szabo’s profile, making him an icon and an example of the masculinity myth.

When we use the word *myth*, we often lend it the meaning of a lie, a fallacy: “that is not true, it’s a myth”. However, myth means the belief of a people, of the whole, of the community, the collectivity, and therefore it becomes true for the people who recognize it. The person who embodies a myth departs from the ordinary, from mortals. The myth survives in a people not for being true, but for reflecting a real aspect of that people and even of all of us (FEIJÓ, 1995). Aladar Szabo embodies the myth of masculinity and he is presented as a model for those who wish to become part of the group of players.

The virile and violent stereotype of the water polo player was there most of the times when some news was presented about that sport. That characteristic enhanced the imagination of those who did not experience it and just listened to the news, as in the example of *O Globo* newspaper’s October 22, 1961 story about the historical match between Botafogo and Fluminense. Note that in that article the author reports that he had not been to the match, but according to the image to which water polo referred, he imagined how things would have happened.

Water Polo is a funny sport: over water everything is very quiet, but underneath the players use their legs more often to beat more violently than Joubert. [...] From time to time the referee will stop the match to count players, and some are always missing. Then a diver goes down to collect mangled bodies. [...] And do you know what it is like to be strangled in the water? Glub! Glub! Glub! [...] And shorts rip all the time! What a shame! Clubs’ uniform departments provide eighty to each player during a match. That’s why São Cristóvão will not play the Water Polo Championship. (SÃO JANUÁRIO, 1961, p. 6)

Szabo sometimes nurtured that image that had been ascribed to his sport. On April 20, 1972, *Jornal da Tarde* reported that Szabo said he used to beat others when he lost his temper in an argument. The player’s success and talent, however, were not forgotten and the same article referred to him as the water polo’s Pelé (A VIOLENTA..., 1972).

A story entitled “He was good at fighting and playing”, published by *Jornal do Brasil* on October 14, 1982, two days after Szabo’s death, clearly attempts to associate him to a violent image. Twenty years after the fateful match against Fluminense in which Szabo scored two goals and the match did not reach its end, the newspaper recalled the player’s attitude. He would have fought inside and outside the pool and he would have broken opponents’ teeth and ribs in other occasions (ERA BOM DE BOLA..., 1982).

Along with a technical level higher than Brazilians’, Szabo’s physical build helped create the myth around him. The most virile plays that involved him gained major proportions. An incident involving Fluminense’s player Álvaro Pires was reported as follows: “Szabo defends himself: elbow blow on Álvaro was an accident” (SZABO... 1962, p. 5). “Aggression and Blood in the Pool” (AGRESSÃO..., 1962, p. 8).

To the press, Szabo used to say that the blow had been an accident and that he had no intention of injuring his opponent. However, Álvaro Pires fainted, lost teeth and underwent face surgery. Szabo also said that the whole episode was a move by Fluminense, his former club, to derail his career and his participation in the Brazilian national team.

The articles “Crisis in the national team: Coach and players refused” (CRISE... 1962, p. 4) and “What they want to do to Szabo is stupid” (ESTÚPIDO..., 1962) pointed out a movement

towards punishing Szabo for what happened with Fluminense's player. CBD's technical council had voted not to draft Szabo to the South American tournament in the Chilean city of Antofagasta. However, the players and the national coach opposed the measure because they knew that their team's aspirations would be reduced without the idol. The same article also considers deportation as a penalty for the player.

At the end of the imbroglio, nothing happened to Szabo and the article entitled "Szabo will be drafted by CBD: majority approves, but there are reactions" (SZABO..., 1962) explains that he would be drafted even though some oppose it, especially CBD's directors. With Szabo's presence, Brazil won the 1962 South American Championship, taking Argentina's hegemony that had lasted three competitions (TELLES, 2005).

That violent fame and the episodes that stress physical strength only helped to justify the masculinized representation of Brazilian water polo. The image is reinforced and represented through Szabo, who would embody the myth of masculinity.

As with many idols, after his death, tributes were made, recalling sentences, interviews, and specific features that keep the player's memory alive in that sport environment. In 1985, a promotional material distributed by Rio de Janeiro Water Federation (FARJ) stressed a sentence where he compared water polo to war. His way to face the sport brought him even closer to the myth of masculinity and reminds us of situations where sport represented wars (FEDERAÇÃO AQUÁTICA DO RIO DE JANEIRO, 1985).

In water polo, specifically in 1956, at the final stage of the Olympic Games in Melbourne, the water polo match between Hungary and the USSR became known as the match of the bloody pool. A film was made about that in 2006, entitled "*Children of Glory*" whose Portuguese version "*Sangue nas águas*" (Blood in the waters) enhanced the symbolic power of a sports "battle".

The film was directed by Hungarian filmmaker Krisztina Goda as part of the activities that recalled the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of an uprising in the country against Soviet domination, which was brutally suppressed. The image of a Hungarian player leaving the water covered in blood spread throughout the world and marked not only the Melbourne Games, but the very Hungarian collective memory of the event (CABO, 2011). In addition to that example, we can mention the boycott to the 1980 Moscow Olympics by capitalist countries and socialist countries' boycott to the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

According to Nolasco (1995b), the war shows us that male irrationality, disguised as moral judgment, gains space in the minds of men, making them play the most radical role in their social identity. Therefore, individual commitment to aggression and violence results in social investment towards wars, which leads us to think of a kind of pressure that men exercise on their own subjectivities as happened with water polo in 1956.

## 6 FINAL REMARKS

Being strong, virile and "manly" are features valued for the player to build his identity and achieve his goals in water polo more easily. Moreover, the presence of an idol confirms and demonstrates the model to be followed.

The 1960s were unique to Brazilian water polo. The country participated in the 1960, 1964 and 1968 Olympic Games and won the 1963 Pan American Games in Sao Paulo,

spreading a lot of news about a winning sport that were uncommon before that. All this was enhanced by a star of the pools, Hungarian Aladar Szabo, who became the protagonist of that time. The result-idol-media combination – significant for the growth of any sport – was never repeated in the history of that sport.

Szabo's performance as a player commented by the media shows the relationship with the characteristics pointed out about masculinity that helped to create/maintain the stereotype of the "water polo player". Print media also helped to disseminate a masculinizing view of that sport, extolling fights, stories and matches that represented and sought to ratify players' truculent images.

News stories drew attention to the virile facet of water polo, and Aladar Szabo's image and fame served as decoys to attract readers. The media discourse of the time greatly marked sports in Brazil, and water polo is still portrayed as violent in other forms of media such as television.

Although we understand that violence is a relational category and that the media constructs a representation of violence about sport, the game model approached in this study caused those from the "outside" to have a vision of a type of hard practice due to players' exacerbated physical contact and low mobility, since, unlike today, their positions in the pool were fixed, which facilitated virile plays.

The game is different nowadays. A lot of speed and acceleration is necessary for ball possession not to exceed 30 seconds and there is not much room for intense physical contact in most positions, providing more dynamic, and – in the eyes of those from the "outside" – more fluid matches. Regarding the future image of that sport, only time will show whether these changes in the game will have any effect on new media headlines.

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