

**Ludica, 17-18, 2011-2012**  
annali di storia e civiltà del gioco

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«Ludica». Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche  
via Cornarotta 7-9, 31100 Treviso  
tel. +39 0422.5121, fax +39 0422.579483  
pubblicazioni@fbsr.it, www.fbsr.it

La pubblicazione degli annali  
è prodotta in collaborazione  
da Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche  
e Viella.

I diritti sono di Fondazione Benetton.  
La redazione declina ogni responsabilità  
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espressamente richiesti.

Pubblicazione scientifica annuale,  
autorizzazione del tribunale di Perugia  
n. 32/95 del 14 luglio 1995.

Direttore responsabile: Gherardo Ortalli.  
ISSN 1126-0890  
ISBN 978-88-8334-771-9

*stampa*

Tipografia CDC Arti Grafiche  
Città di Castello (Perugia)

*abbonamento annuale*  
per l'Italia euro 44,00  
per l'estero euro 51,00

*distribuzione e abbonamenti*

Viella libreria editrice  
via delle Alpi 32, 00198 Roma  
tel. +39 06.8417758, fax +39 06.85353960  
info@viella.it, www.viella.it

*Referenze sulle illustrazioni*

p. 29, fig. 1: L'Aia, Koninklijke  
Bibliotheek; p. 67, fig. 1: Archivium  
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su concessione del Ministero dei Beni e  
delle Attività Culturali, autorizzazione del  
27 novembre 2013, n. 36/2013, prot. 5309,  
cl. 28.28.00/94.33; p. 73, fig. 4: Barcellona,  
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Parigi, Musée Carnavalet, copyright  
Roger-Viollet; p. 169, figg. 1-2: fotografia  
di Charis Psychopaidi; p. 177, figg. 1-2:  
Modena, Biblioteca Estense Universitaria,  
su concessione del Ministero dei Beni e  
delle Attività Culturali, autorizzazione del  
1° giugno 2013, prot. 1989, cl. 28.13.07/11;  
p. 179, fig. 5: Roma, Bibliotheca Hertziana,  
Max-Planck-Institut für Kunstgeschichte.  
L'editore è disponibile a regolare eventuali  
spettanze per le immagini delle quali non  
sia stato possibile reperire la fonte.

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Anne-Laure Keizer; Jesko Kleine;  
John Millerchip; Traduttori Associati,  
Treviso.

DOMENICO ELIA

**Giuseppe Pezzarossa's gymnastics games for «Educazione e Lavoro»**

A great contribution to the development both of gymnastics in private associations and physical education in Apulian schools was provided, around the middle of 19th century, by Giuseppe Pezzarossa (1851-1911), who worked as a gymnastics teacher and founded an important workshop of gymnastics and educational equipment in 1880 (fig. 1). During the same year Pezzarossa represented Italy at the World Congress of Gymnastics in Frankfurt, and the journey gave him the opportunity to observe the condition of gymnastics in Germany. This experience led him to express great appreciation of the German approach, since in Germany gymnastics contributed to the creation of the best European army:

«So – Pezzarossa wrote at the end of his report of the Congress – we too could have strong soldiers, lively and healthy citizens who are also capable of doing their duties well»<sup>1</sup>.

As a result of his approval of the German model of military gymnastics, Pezzarossa championed the point of view expressed by Obermann's followers, in opposition to the innovative proposals put forward by the members of the Scuola Normale Ginnastica of Rome, directed from 1884 by Emilio Baumann. Pezzarossa adopted a variety of different strategies to support the increasing popularity of gymnastics. Between 1879 and 1882 he taught at the Reale Scuola Magistrale di Ginnastica in Bari (fig. 2). Later, in 1892, he and some partners founded the Pro patria, one of the most important gymnastics clubs not only in Apulia but also in the entire South of Italy.

Nonetheless, Pezzarossa was severely criticised by some local newspapers, which were contrary to gymnastics and considered it nothing more than exhibitionism (*Rintocchi*,

«Fra' Melitone. Giornale della Domenica», 2nd July 1888).

In addition to this criticism, the Apulian teacher received adverse publicity from government functionaries such as the Royal Director of Education, Chiaia<sup>2</sup>, who accused him of giving priority to increasing his profits through the sale of gymnastics equipment produced in his workshop, rather than to giving students greater opportunities for practising gymnastics.

Despite the failure of some of his projects, Pezzarossa's activity as a theorist of physical education was much appreciated. His experience as a teacher and his skill at devising alternative solutions in order to enable pupils to practise gymnastics even in schools where there were neither gyms nor open spaces equipped for gymnastics were sure warrants for the success of his gymnastics column in the magazine «Educazione e Lavoro». Every week the columns described several «gymnastics games» («giuochi ginnastici») which could be done both in schoolrooms and outdoors.

Gymnastics games already included in 1862 school programmes<sup>3</sup> were made compulsory in schools by the «Regolamento, programmi e istruzioni per le scuole primarie, secondarie, normali, maschili e femminili del Regno», published on 16th December 1878<sup>4</sup>. As a consequence, they became an important theme in schoolbooks of Physical Education in the last quarter of the 19th and the early 20th century. In 1875, Valletti, Caveglia e Borgna, followers of Obermann, wrote the «Manuale di ginnastica educativa secondo il sistema Rodolfo Obermann» and paid great attention to gymnastics games. In addition, gymnastics games had already been studied in the German area and in the same period the German approach was becoming popular in Italy thanks to the monumental translation of Kloss's writings<sup>5</sup>. Ten years later, in 1886, new Italian school regulations placed greater emphasis on gymnastics games differentiating and adapting them respectively to rural schools, boys'

1. «E così potremmo anche noi avere forti soldati, cittadini di energica volontà, di robusta e forte costituzione fisica, capaci di adempiere scrupolosamente il proprio dovere», PEZZAROSSA 1881, p. 30.

2. Letter of Royal Director of Education Chiaia to Mayor of Bari, *Palestra Ginnastica*, Bari 1st March 1899. Bari State Archives, Bari Municipal Historical Archives, III Post-Unification Collection, Cat. IX, Cl. 9, F. 1635, bundle 2.

3. See Ministry of Public Instruction pronouncement, *Gymnastics education theory and rules*, no. 116, 5th February 1862.

4. GOTTA 1953, p. 31.

5. KLOSS 1876.



1. Title page of the catalogue published by Pezzarossa's firm. The catalogues of Pezzarossa's gymnastics and educational equipment company were printed twice-yearly and helped to publicize his workshop in Italy and abroad.

The picture shows the title page of the catalogue for the second half of 1924. Bari State Archives, Bari Municipal Historical Archives, II Post-Unification Collection, F. 1523, bundle 12.

2. Teacher Training School for Gymnastics in Bari. Giuseppe Pezzarossa taught at this school during the years 1879-1882. The school was established, along with other sister institutions, in 1879. The picture shows Pezzarossa (on the right) with other teachers and pupils. Central State Archive, Italian Ministry of Education, Libraries and General Affairs Division, b. 11, Ginnastica, tiro a segno, nuoto, palestre, scherma, bundle 21.



schools and girls' schools. According to Valletti and Baumann, who designed the new school programmes, this system prompted teachers to play gymnastics games at all school levels, assuring them more success<sup>6</sup>. The authors summarized their core ideas as follows: «well-designed and well-played gymnastics games improve and enhance sociability, fairness, courage, kindness, bravery, etc. etc.»<sup>7</sup>. However, the advance of gymnastics games was strictly bound to the availability of gyms and outdoor

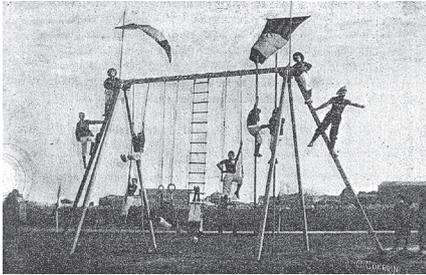
spaces equipped for gymnastics, and City councils, which were responsible for the building of efficient gyms according to national laws<sup>8</sup>, were reluctant to invest. The absence of equipped spaces was particularly evident in the underdeveloped areas: in a word, in the South of Italy. There was clear evidence that the very bad conditions of schoolrooms in Southern Italy were one of the biggest difficulties for physical education teachers<sup>9</sup>. They were daily forced to find a way of practising gymnastics

6. FERRARA 1992, p. 162.

7. «Coi giochi bene scelti e bene diretti si sviluppa e si coltiva il sentimento dell'associazione, della giustizia, del coraggio, della generosità e del valore, ecc. ecc.», VALLETTI 1896, p. 28.

8. GOTTA 1953, p. 33

9. SANSÒ 1883.



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3. One of the most prominent of the pieces of equipment designed by Pezzarossa is described in the catalogue as a Climbing and exercise frame, depicted in this photograph. Smaller versions were designed for Nursery or Primary Schools. Bari State Archives, Prefecture II Series, Dossier 79 Debiti e Crediti, bundle 13.

10. «Molti giuochi proposti per le scuole elementari possono essere eseguiti soltanto in ampi locali, nei cortili o in qualche prato o piazzale; e di alcuni di essi, anche essendoci il locale adatto, mancando di attrezzi richiesti, non può avvalersene il maestro», PEZZAROSSA 1884a.

11. «Non ancora, tranne qualche rarissimo esempio, v'è stato alcuno che siasi occupato di ciò nelle scuole elementari, ove, se si vuole profitto e disciplina, l'ambiente scolastico devesi mantenere sereno ed allegro», PEZZAROSSA 1884a.

12. PEZZAROSSA 1884c.

13. PEZZAROSSA 1884d.

14. «Applicazioni per la storia, la geografia, la parte monumentale delle città, la scultura ecc.», PEZZAROSSA 1884b.

and usually were not able to run their programmes, despite the fact that the physical and moral benefits of gymnastics were underlined unanimously by pedagogical specialists. Concerning this point, Pezzarossa wrote: «A lot of the games suggested for Primary Schools can be played only in large rooms, in yards, lawns or squares; moreover, even when a suitable place is available, most times the equipment is not, so the teacher cannot play those games»<sup>10</sup>.

To overcome these difficulties, Pezzarossa proposed some new gymnastics games which could take place not only in yards and squares, but, with slight changes, in classrooms of normal size. Of central concern here is the fact that the Apulian teacher was conscious of the seriousness of the challenge, since «no-one, barring a few exceptions, dealt with this problem in Primary Schools, where, if we want to maintain both good performances and order, the school environment must be caring and happy»<sup>11</sup>.

As a result, the games devised by Pezzarossa during 1884 were directed both at those teachers who could lead pupils outdoors or in gyms and at the majority of teachers, whose schools were not equipped for gymnastics. Examining several of the gymnastics games proposed by Pezzarossa, it is worth noting that a common aim is to educate pupils to «love quick and unquestioning obedience»<sup>12</sup> through imitation of the teachers' movements and attention to their verbal instructions. The games were also designed to achieve another important goal, related to health: considerable attention was paid to relaxation after study, so that mental effort alternated with physical exertion. Hence, some of Pezzarossa's gymnastics games included both gymnastic exercises and recreational activities (for example *La maestra non è in iscuola*), while others required pupils to alternate playing and listening to teachers' requests (for example *L'ubbidienza pronta* [Ready to obey]). It is extremely important to note that these activities were considered «games» not only

because they included recreational moments – those preferred by the children – but also because of the way pupils were punished when they transgressed the rules. In fact, when pupils did something wrong or when their behaviour did not comply with the instructions, they were forbidden to play with others<sup>13</sup>, so, according to many educational theories of the period, they were prevented from pouring out the energy repressed during morning classes. Other kinds of punishment were the execution of gymnastic exercises by pupils who paid no attention to teachers' requests, as happened playing *Vola vola* [Fly again], or sitting aside while schoolmates were playing, as happened in *Cambiar di posto* [Swap places]. Another interesting feature of some of Pezzarossa's games was that they required desks: this fact implies that they were conceived for classrooms. It is the case, for example, of *Le statue e l'inglese* [Italian statues and an English buyer]: pupils were required to jump on their desks and impersonate grotesque figures, which were supposed to be antique Greek and Roman statues. This game combined amusement and development of an aesthetic sense. A pupil chosen as «the curator» had to persuade a classmate chosen as «the English buyer» to buy one of the statues by describing its artistic qualities, where it had been found, how the excavation of archaeological remains had been done and so on. Consequently, the game gave the teacher the opportunity of multi-disciplinary links «applying history, geography, notions about city monuments, sculpture etc.»<sup>14</sup>. At the end of the game, the statues bought had to perform a gymnastic exercise, while «the curator» and «the English buyers» became statues too. Others Pezzarossa's games are significant since they combined different school subjects: this happened, for example, in *La tavola pitagorica e la ginnastica* [The multiplication table and gymnastics] and *Il vapore* [Choo-choo train]. The first game required pupils to

alternate physical exercises with the recitation of the multiplication table: those who were unable to do that paid a forfeit chosen by the teacher. The aim of *Il vapore* was learning geography, since pupils assumed the identity of an Italian or European city. In the simplest version the children whose cities were called out by the teacher had to swap places. In an advanced variant, each pupil had to touch all the classmates who represented intermediate stations until the final destination: for example, if the final destination chosen was Lecce, the pupil who represented Naples had to touch “Caserta”, “Foggia”, “Bari” and “Brindisi”. After explaining the game rules, Pezzarossa concluded that *Il vapore* was «especially suitable for teaching geography, since you can assign to pupils the names of European capitals or of other foreign cities»<sup>15</sup>.

As we have seen, Pezzarossa was one of the first promoters of gymnastics games in Southern Italy. Nonetheless, other colleagues supported the combination of gymnastics games with school subjects: for example, Giuseppe Sindona suggested combining gymnastics and singing, asserting that pupils would gain a double benefit. «Singing – Sindona wrote – makes the heart gentle, sensible, lovely, trains the ear to identify harmony and enjoy music [...] it improves the capacity of the lungs and deepens breathing»<sup>16</sup>. In conclusion, the main aim of gymnastics games was to develop the senses – especially sight and hearing – and to avert the deleterious effects of bad posture on skeleton and muscles (fig. 4). For example, in *Il getto della palla* – a sort of *Crack up ball game* – pupils had to catch a ball thrown by the teacher, training their eyes and their arms to have fast reflexes, even when surrounded by desks and school equipment<sup>17</sup>. On the other hand, hearing was the core sense of *La mosca cieca* [*Blind man’s bluff*], a game in which a player, designated as «it», was blindfolded and tried to touch and identify the other players, who tried to escape and, when touched, to mislead him by changing their voices.

Pezzarossa was provided with evidence of the good results obtained by the gymnastics games by some of his colleagues, who underlined significant progress made by their pupils thanks to this sort of physical activity. Angelo Lella, a teacher from Bari, had previously complained that «a lot of pupils, when reading, were incapable of arriving at a comma to breathe [...] but] it’s not their fault, they do not have enough lung capacity»<sup>18</sup>. After giving his pupils regular practice in gymnastics games he wrote that «none of them stop where they must not, but maintain the same voice and vocal intonation until the pause is required»<sup>19</sup>.

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4. School illnesses. The Pezzarossa catalogue for the second half of 1906 illustrated some of the schoolchild ailments caused by faulty posture. Although the purpose of the illustration was to draw attention, by implication, to the virtues of the Pezzarossa desk compared with those made by his competitors, it is undeniable that many of the school desks made in other small workshops contributed to the incidence of what were called “school ailments”. National Monument Library of Praglia (Padua).

15. Il gioco si prestava «molto bene per l’insegnamento della geografia, potendosi anche assegnare per nomi di città quelle delle capitali d’Europa, o di altra nazione che non sia l’Italia», PEZZAROSSA 1884f.

16. «Il canto oltre di ingentilire il cuore, lo rende più sensibile, affettuoso, educa l’orecchio all’armonia e al gusto musicale [...] e esercita i polmoni, rendendo il respiro molto più attivo», SINDONA 1884.

17. Il gioco abituava «l’occhio e il braccio a colpire nel segno, anche essendo in iscuola fra’ banchi», PEZZAROSSA 1884e.

18. LELLA 1884.

19. LELLA 1884.

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MIKA RISSANEN

### **Beer breaks during the Tour de France. Some observations on beer and cycling in the early 1900s**

In a photograph taken during the Tour de France in the early 1900s two riders are sitting on the steps of a tavern. They are clearly in the middle of the race, with their goggles up on their foreheads and spare tyres criss-crossed around their upper bodies. And in their hands they've got... steins of beer!

The roots of many modern sports can be traced back to 19th century England. The development of leisure activities into regulated sports took place among both the upper classes and the masses, the growing working class. In both groups there was room for alcohol and sports in the same picture. After a round of golf it was natural that the gentlemen had a drink at the "19th hole". For those humbler people, on the other hand, who played team sports such as football, which had their origins in rural folk games, ale was an essential part of the carnival atmosphere. Beer was also regarded as an important element in one's diet, especially for those whose work demanded physical strength. Against this background it is no surprise that at the end of the 19th century and in the early 20th alcoholic beverages were also widely used during athletic events. John Badcock, a pseudonymous sports writer, had advised athletes in 1828 that «with respect to liquors, they must always be taken cold; and home-brewed beer, old but not bottled, is the best. A little red wine, however, may be given to those who are not fond of malt liquor». Although there was more criticism of the use of alcohol during competition after the middle of the 19th century, many athletes were still following Badcock's guidelines in the early 1900s.

When Margaret Gast cycled her 2,600 miles in thirteen days in 1900, she included small amounts of brandy and ale in her diet. In general, endurance athletes preferred liquors that they