

The influence of sporting success on the sports coverage of Spanish women: the London 2012 and Rio 2016 Olympic Games

Influencia del éxito deportivo en la cobertura del deporte femenino español: los Juegos Olímpicos de Londres 2012 y Río 2016



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Abstract:

Sporting success has a positive impact on the collective mood of a country and helps to strengthen its national identity. This is one reason why there is a correlation between the expectations for certain athletes to win and the social and media follow-up of them. The Spanish female athletes in London 2012 and Rio 2016 won more medals than the male athletes. This study analyses whether these achievements favoured greater media coverage, if they were narrated in terms of national pride, if female athletes were represented as sports references and whether the values that were highlighted correspond to those associated with exemplary sports practice. To examine such results, content analysis and critical reading of these Olympic Games' special supplements published by the newspaper Marca is carried out. The results reveal that the news value of the athlete's Spanish nationality prevails over her sporting achievements in the media coverage of women's sport. Although women's performance is associated with effort or a winning mentality, the inspiring role models in sport continue to be male athletes.

Keywords:

Olympic Games; women's sport; critical feminist theory; sporting success; sports model; national pride.

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Resumen:

El éxito deportivo influye positivamente en el ánimo colectivo de un país y en el reforzamiento de su identidad nacional. Esta es una de las razones por las que existe correspondencia entre las expectativas de triunfo depositadas en determinados/as deportistas y el seguimiento social e informativo que se hace de ellos/as. Las atletas españolas en Londres 2012 y Río 2016 consiguieron más medallas que los representantes masculinos. Este estudio analiza si estos logros favorecieron su mayor cobertura mediática, si se narraron en clave de orgullo nacional, si se presentaron a las atletas como referentes deportivos y si los valores que se destacaron de ellas se corresponden con los asociados a la práctica deportiva ejemplar. Para ello se realiza un análisis de contenido y una lectura crítica de los suplementos especiales sobre esos Juegos Olímpicos publicados por el diario deportivo español Marca. Los resultados revelan que, en el tratamiento mediático del deporte femenino, prima el valor informativo de la nacionalidad española de la atleta por encima del de sus logros deportivos. Y que, aunque su actuación se asocie a valores como el esfuerzo o la mentalidad ganadora, los modelos inspiradores en el deporte siguen estando encarnados por ellos.

Palabras clave:

Juegos Olímpicos; deporte femenino; teoría crítica feminista; éxito deportivo; referente deportivo; orgullo nacional.

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1. Introduction

Sporting achievements influence a country's collective mood, strengthening its national identity and sometimes turning athletes into references and role models. As Fernández and Bassani (2008, p. 46) highlight, sports activities are today "at the centre of national identities," and sports competitions have become a phenomenon that has a profound impact on the construction of nation's and their population's collective and individual social trust (Humanez, 2014). As the then president of Spain, Mariano Rajoy, would write at the end of the London 2012 Olympic Games in an opinion column published by *Marca*: "Spanish sportsmen and women must know that their efforts, hours of training and self-improvement, have served to satisfy an entire country" (*Marca*, 12/08/2012 p. 11).

The mass media coverage of these sporting feats contributes to reinforcing the role of sport as a social binder and national confidence (González-Ramallal, 2008; Meneses, 2008). It also ensures that some athletes' sporting success is transferred to the country they represent (Caspistegui, 2012), encouraging citizens to do those sports (Méndez-Giménez, Fernández-Rio, and González, 2008). As indicated by Moragas (2000), "the mass media contribute to a notable increase in the national triumphalism of victories." Durántez (2012) states that:

Through the press and other media and advertising, the Olympic medalist is given fame, the spotlight, and transcendence, where a whole series of results and classifications are stated according to the type of medal won and by which, even omitting the names of the athletes who have won, the absurd conclusion is reached that this or that country has won the Games (pp. 351-352).

We have focused our research on the London 2012 and Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympic Games based on the premise that the media turns the elite sportsperson into a source of national pride and a sports reference when s/he wins international events. Our research analyses whether this is the case for these Olympic athletes.

These Olympic events have been chosen because in London 2012 (considered as "the women's games as 4,676 athletes participated –46% of the athletes–, in all sports, and all delegations had a female representative), the Spanish sportswomen achieved such unexpected success as the male representatives' failure. The Spanish men's football team, a candidate for gold, was eliminated in the first phase. And male athletes won 6 medals (half of those won in Beijing 2008) while female athletes won 11 (in Beijing 2008 they won 4). For the first time, the Spanish female representatives won more medals than the men. This superiority would be repeated- albeit with a smaller difference (8/9)- in Rio in 2016.

The research is framed within critical feminist theory. As Kane and Maxwell (2011:203) highlighted regarding sports media coverage, a critical theorist asks whose voices, perspectives, and experiences are considered valid and dominant; and who are considered to be the essential athletes when analysing to whom the media pays attention and gives credibility (Alvesson and Willmott, 2003). As a subset of critical theory, feminist critical theory assumes that society is structured around a series of inequitable power relations through which women are systematically devalued

and marginalised (Birrell, 2000; Hoerber, 2007). Concerning female athletes' media coverage, this translates into a quantitative and qualitative under-representation in the media.

Women's sport has always had less media coverage than men's (Cooky, Ducan y Messner, 2005; Crouse, 2013; Fink and Kensicki, 2002; Grau, Roselli, and Taylor, 2007; Messner and Hextum, 2013). In Sainz de Baranda's (2013) study of the Spanish sports press during 1979-2010, she states that the information on women's sport does not exceed 4% in any of the years analysed. In 2015, the situation was very similar: the report *Presencia y tratamiento del deporte Femenino en la Prensa generalista Vasca y en periódicos de información deportiva*, prepared by the Basque Government's Directorate of Youth and Sports, confirms that the information referring exclusively to women's sport accounts for 4.96% of what is published in sports media.

However, the fact that the best female athletes compete in all Olympic Games to become Olympic champions and/or break the current record leads us to believe that women's events' media coverage has increased notably. Supposing that the success in sports competitions influences the national mood and confidence, it is assumed that the news coverage of particular sports and athletes and the likelihood of getting good results will correspond. In other words, the media will report more on the national athletes who win medals than those who do not.

Qualitatively, the media image of women as athletes is also undervalued compared to their male counterparts; it is associated more with female stereotypes than with their value as athletes (Alfaro, Bengoechea and Vázquez, 2010; Angulo, 2007; Bissell and Duke, 2007; Daniels, 2009; Giuliano, Turner, Lundquist and Knight, 2007; Jones, 2006; Kim, Walkosz, and Iverson, 2006; Knight and Giuliano, 2001; Lallana, 2005; Mateos, Martínez and Rodríguez, 2005; Sanz, 2012; Shaller, 2006).

From a critical feminist reading, we pose the following research questions in the described context of Spanish sportswomen's successful sports performance and results (medals) in London 2012 and Rio de Janeiro 2016.

- 1.) Were the successes in Spanish women's sports in those Olympic events narrated in terms of national pride?
- 2.) Do the values that stood out from the female athletes correspond to those traditionally associated with sports role models such as effort, sacrifice, personal improvement, etc.?
- 3.) Did the medals won in London 2012 positively influence athletes' quantitative and qualitative news coverage in the next Olympic Games in Rio 2016?

2. Methodology

The information published by the Spanish sports newspaper *Marca* has been used as a study sample to answer these questions in this research. The newspaper's position in the readers' rankings warrants its choice. *Marca* is a reference in Spain's sports press and has had the highest readership for decades; it also had the biggest audience in 2012 and 2016 when our research was carried out. The data provided by the General Media Study shows that over the years, *Marca's*

audience has progressively declined, just like the rest of the sports newspapers printed in Spain. However, its readers represent half of the sports press audience, overtaking *As*; *Sport y Mundo Deportivo* combined. *Marca* registered an average of 3, 011, 000 readers/day from February-November 2012 and 2, 165, 000 readers/day. This means that *Marca* can significantly influence the image projected of sport in general and, more specifically, of the Olympic Games and women's participation in them.

Our analysis is focused on the special supplements on the Olympic Games published by *Marca*: the 2012 Games Supplement from 27 July to 13 August 2012 and *The Games Newspaper* with *Marca* as the headline. Games of the XXXI Rio Olympic Games 2016 from 2 to 23 August 2016. Therefore these are the periods of our analysis: from 27 July to 13 August 2012 and from 2 to 23 August 2016. The methodology employed combines quantitative and qualitative techniques such as content analysis –exploratory and descriptive approaches to formulating reproducible and valid inferences applicable to a context based on certain data (Krippendorff, 2018)– and critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1999). We make a critical reading of the supplements published before the beginning of the 2012 and 2016 Olympic Games to verify how interested *Marca* is in Spanish sportswomen at the beginning of the two Olympic Games. We also determine whether the women's success in London 2012 positively influenced *Marca's* initial coverage of women's sports in Rio 2016.

Subsequently, we study the news value of the Spanish sportswomen's nationality as *Marca's* priority over the news value of the sport's success through a quantitative analysis of the supplements and a critical reading of their covers. News values are those criteria that influence the choice of an event as publishable news, i.e., those values that give information interest to an event.

In order to carry out this quantitative analysis, we study the information units where female athletes –who compete individually or as a team– constitute the subject of the headline either by being named directly, “Carolina Marín is also the queen of audiences” (26/8/2016 p. 14) or indirectly, “It's now or now” (20/08/2016 p. 17), a headline that refers to the Spanish rhythmic gymnastics team. The women's spotlight can be exclusive (“Mireia Shines” 8/08/2016 cover) or shared with male athletes (“Athleticism is recovering” 22/08/2016 p. 4, the headline of a news item about Ruth Beitia's and Orlando Ortega's performance). Our analysis focuses on the news items in which sportswomen are exclusively in the headline.

The following are considered information units 1) the texts of any news genre published by the newspaper, made up of headlines, the body of text and photographs or not; 2) the headlines without text or images that the newspaper publishes on the cover of the supplements and 3) the photo news or headlines only accompanied by a photograph.

244 information units have been registered from London 2012 (183 correspond to national athletes and 61 to international athletes) and 218 information units for Rio 2016 (147 on national athletes and 71 on international athletes). Data is gathered from each of these information units for which a spreadsheet has been used for quantitative processing.

Of all the variables used for data collection, the following have been used for this article: to identify the information unit in its journalistic context, the categories Headline, subheadline, Date of Publication, and the page number. To identify

sportswomen, the categories Full name, nationality, with the variables National Sportswoman/Foreign sportswoman; Sports discipline, using the variables corresponding to all sports according to the list set out by the IOC (International Olympic Committee). The category Theme with the following variables: Successes, failures, classification and medal, and the sportswoman's Physical and mental characteristics. Preparation and organisation of the team/Personal issues/Concrete evidence//Direct rivalry/Economic aspects of elite sports/The sportswoman's sports career/Olympic Village: day to day/ Health (doping, etc.)/ Olympic Games: organisation/Olympic Games: media coverage is registered to verify the priority topic addressed in the information units.

Finally, a critical reading is made of the coverage given to the women's match race team's participation in London 2012 and the badminton player Carolina Marín in Rio 2016. The objective is to determine the difference between the coverage of both achievements due to their expectations to win. The former was barely known, and the gold medal was a surprise while all hopes were placed on Marín to win gold. It is interesting to note what qualities of theirs stand out and if the chronicles are written in a tone of national pride.

3. Coverage the days before the start of the Olympic Games

Spanish sportswomen have been represented in the Olympic medal tally since the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games, with 4 golds (Miriam Blasco and Almudena Muñoz in judo; the duo Theresa Zabell and Patricia Guerra in sailing and the women's Spanish grass field hockey team), 3 silvers (Carolina Pascual in gymnastics, in doubles tennis Arantxa Sánchez Vicario and Concepción Martínez, and in sailing Natalia Vía-Dufresne), and 1 bronze in tennis won by Arantxa Sánchez Vicario.

Spain's organisation of these Olympic Games meant an increase in sportswomen's participation, from 31 women in the 1988 Seoul Olympics to 128 in Barcelona 1992. Until then, Spanish women's involvement in the 20th century Olympic Games had been almost non-existent. In Paris 1900, four women competed for the first time, and it was not until Rome 1960 that Spanish sportswomen competed again in an Olympic Games, with 11 participants. Since Barcelona 1992, the number of Spanish women Olympians has not fallen below 90, and their presence has increased, bridging the gap between men's participation. Thus, in the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, 143 women and 163 men competed in the Spanish team.

As mentioned above, Barcelona 1992 was a turning point in women's participation in the Olympic Games, and this was reflected in the Spanish medal count: female athletes won 8 medals. After Barcelona 1992 and until London 2012, the tendency in the Spanish medal counts was to maintain women's presence in them, but in a significantly lower proportion than men: Atlanta 1996 (6/10), Sydney 2000 (4/7), Athens 2004 (4/13) and Beijing 2008 (4/12).

This trend made it impossible to predict what would happen in the London 2012 Olympic Games. The Spanish female athletes won more than the men for the first time: 11, while the men won 6.

On 27 July 2012, a day in which the opening ceremony of the Olympic games was to take place, *Marca* published the special supplement “Ready, Steady, Go” in which it referred to the London Olympic venue and mainly to the athletes who were expected to win medals and /or break a record. The content analysis of this supplement shows that on the one hand, the news importance is given to sporting success and, on the other hand, how Spanish female athletes are not sporting references for *Marca* in the beginning. However, neither are female international athletes; in other words, women’s sports do not grab the newspaper’s attention. This can already be seen from the subheadline of the cover of this supplement: “Gasol, Phelps or Bolt are some of the sportsmen who will try to break records over the next 15 days in one of the most emblematic cities in the world.”

The cover and the main pages focus on the NBA, Paul Gasol, Michel Phelps, Yonan Blake, Usain Bolt, Asafa Powell, Tyson Gay, Roger Federer, David Ferrer, and the Brazilian men’s football team in texts and images of the 16-page supplement- 10 after taking away 6 pages of advertising. Women’s sport is referred to on only two pages, 9 and 14, in the last paragraphs of the news; and the 24 photos in which athletes appear, only 4 are of a female athlete; and of these, only one is of Spanish sportswomen: a photograph of the female synchronised swimming team’s legs sticking out of the water.

There is a column with the headline “Favourites to be crowned on the athletics track” on the right-hand side of page 9, 8 photographs and texts of the leading sportsmen and women expected to win medals: 4 of them refer to non-national sportswomen. Spanish sportswomen only appear on page 14, the last news page of the supplement. On this page, five short texts refer to the Spanish representative’s chances of winning, with only one of them- “Silver mermaids, podium certainty”- dedicated to the national synchronised swimming athletes (there is no male team in this discipline). The women’s synchronised swimming team had won the silver medal and the duo medal with Andrea Fuentes and Gemma Mengual at the previous Olympic Games in Beijing 2008.

Spanish sportswomen won more medals –11 than the male representatives’ 6 medals in the London 2012 Olympic Games-. The increasing media importance given to women’s sports could lead one to believe that *Marca* would give more media coverage to Spanish women’s sports at the beginning of the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. However, this was not the case; female national athletes barely appeared in the articles and images. The newspaper scarcely covered women’s sports in the days before the start of the Games.

During those days, *Marca* published the supplement The Games Newspaper with the following headline: Pure Gold (2 August), Ready (3 August), Steady...(4 August) Go!!!! (5 August). The presence of both female national and international athletes is anecdotal in photos.

Fig 1: Number of photographs published N= national athletes, I=international athletes

	2 August	3 August	4 August	5 August
Photos men s	24 (N8 I16)	16 (N13 I3)	15 (N8 I7)	14 (N9 I5)
Photos women	3 (N1 I2)	4 (N3 I1)	3 (N2 I1)	5 (2N 3I)

Source: created by the author

Men are in the spotlight in the images where athletes are not playing a sport but doing an Olympic village activity. These are the captions of those images in which only men appear: “Selfie of basketball veterans,” “Nadal-Go in Rio,” “Spanish sportsmen and women pose in Barajas before leaving for Rio,” “The first departure from the village,” and “The priest Lusek among the Italian beach volleyball players.”

In the texts published those days, very few sportswomen appear. 2 August, the cover and pages 2 and 3 are on the “Dream Team” from the United States; pages 4 and 5 for Rafa Nadal and David Ferrer; and page 6 for Neymar and the Brazilian men’s football team. It is not until page 7 that a sportswoman appears: the Nepalese swimmer Singh, the youngest olympian and survivor of Nepal’s earthquake in 2015. The news focus, therefore, is not on sports itself. The Brazilian weightlifter Fernando Reis and the ballplayer Eli Pinedo share the spotlight on the next page on the back cover. Eli Pinedo responded to the “Test of the Games,” which *Marca* dedicates to a sportsman or woman every day. In the headline of this test, Usain Bolt is more important than the sportswoman herself:

Headline: “I would dance the Samba with Usain Bolt.”

Subheadline: Eli Pinedo, one of “Spain’s warrior’s,” would like to “be a rock star in another life.” She arrives in Rio, wanting to meet her idol Usain Bolt.

In the supplement “Ready...” from 3 August, the cover, pages 2 and 3, are dedicated to football. The photographs, infographics, and texts are quantitatively and spatially balanced between women’s and men’s football. One aspect that can be improved upon, however, is the androcentric treatment (Vid. Alfaro, Bengoetxea, and Vázquez, 2010, p. 24) given to the Brazilian captain, Marta Viera, who is called Pelé wearing a skirt. The footballer is feminised through the “skirt” when female footballers always play in shorts. The footballers share the spotlight in this supplement with the Syrian swimmer Yusra Mardini, from the refugee team. The article on Yusra Mardini refers to events unrelated to her sports career: she saved 16 people by towing a boat from Turkey to Greece. Alba Torrens, who answers the Games test, is the only Spanish sportswoman referred to in that day’s supplement.

In the 4 August supplement, there are only two sportswomen, Ruth Beitia and Mireia Belmonte. The report titled “Medalitis is the average pattern” and another three dedicated to homosexual athletes who went to Rio. In the 5 August supplement, again, only two texts are devoted to women: one about the handball player Darly Zoqbi and another to the female NBA. As stated in the text dedicated to the women’s basketball team, “Spanish women’s sport was the protagonist of the London Games (...). However, their successes have not been enough for the girls to compete with men in terms of impact” (4/08/2016 p. 8).

4. The priority news value: sportswomen's Spanish nationality

We want to verify what news value is more important for a sports newspaper, such as *Marca*, when covering female athletes' sports performance in the Olympic Games; whether the athlete's Spanish nationality or sports success is more important.

The first set of data obtained after a quantitative analysis of the information units is that Spanish sportswomen accounted for 75% (183) of the 244 information units devoted to female athletes in the London 2012 Olympics, three times more than international female athletes, in the 218 information units for Rio 2016 greater coverage was also given to national sportswomen than to non-Spanish ones: 147 information units (67.4%) compared to 71 (32.6%)¹

Furthermore, suppose there is a chance for a Spanish female athlete to win a medal in a competition. In that case, she appears in the newspaper earlier. There is more information about her performance, even if she does not finally win a medal, than about the gold medal won by international sportswomen in that discipline.

This was seen in *Marca's* 400m final swim coverage, both in London 2012 and Rio 2016. In 2012, the Chinese swimmer Ye Shinwen's, who was only 16 years old, spectacular triumph by beating the world record, occupies a double column and an image on page 5 of the booklet ("Shiwen Ye launches swimming into the future," 29 July). The swimmer Mireia Belmonte's performance, who finished in eighth place, however, is on the front page of the supplement with the headline: "Disappointment, Mireia and cycling, poor Spanish start"; in a full-page chronicle with two photographs inside the newspaper, one of them in six columns: "Mireia shrinks in the Olympic final" (29 July, p. 4).

In Rio 2016, the female Spanish swimmer wins the bronze medal in this event. It has news importance in *Marca* once again. It monopolises the front page and the cover of the booklet, with a six-column photo and the headline "Mireia Shines," page 2 and three columns on page 3 with a text describing the Spanish swimmer's qualities and achievements ("She is unique," p. 2 and 3, 8 August) and a chronicle of the comeback she made in the last 50 meters of the race.

The winner of this 400m freestyle final, the Hungarian Katinka Hosszu, beat the incredible record that Shiwen Ye had set in 2012. But, Mireia Belmonte received more importance in *Marca* than she did, having to make do with a photo and a three-column text on page 3 ("Beyond Reason," p. 3, 8 August).

Marca highlights our sportswomen more, and it is evident in the news that occupies the newspaper and their absence or presence in the visual elements (photographs, graphs). Furthermore, this importance is highlighted in the texts, which influence whether or not the news is the Visual Centre of Impact (VCI) of the page, i.e., on the part of the page

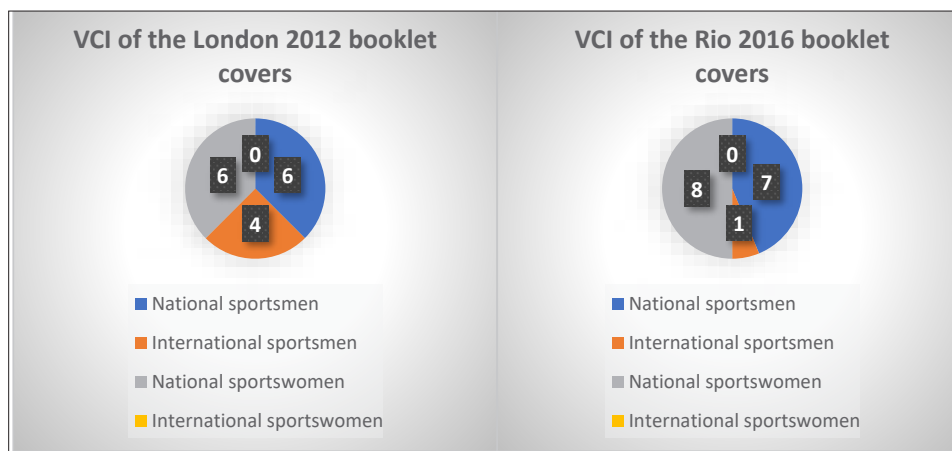
¹ The total of the news units dedicated to women in London 2012 is higher than Rio 2016, that is why the percentage of this compared to the total is mentioned in the analysis as well as the figure. When assessing this difference in the number of news units, the number of pages of the supplements must be taken into account, the supplement in 2012 has an average of 28 pages, while the average of the 2016 supplement is 20 pages. The fact that there are fewer pages in the 2016 one is mainly due to sports readers reading digital newspapers rather than print (lost 846,000 readers between 2012 and 2016 according to data from EGM) and to the decrease in advertising in print media, mainly because of the economic crisis in Spain which caused a decline in readership.

that immediately grabs the viewer's attention (García 1983). As shown in Fig 2, Spanish sportswomen are the VCI in six of the booklet's covers as they star in photographs and the main headlines in London 2012.

Men's sports are in the spotlight of the other ten covers of the booklet: international sportswomen, therefore, do not receive the most news importance on any given day. International male athletes do so on four covers: the American swimmer Michel Phelps twice, The French swimmer Angel Lochte on one front page, and Usain Bolt in the 100m final. Spanish male athletes appear on six covers: the soccer team, the judoka Sugoi Uriarte, the tennis player Feliciano López and David Ferrer, and the basketball team three times.

In Rio 2016, the Spanish sportswomen appeared more often on the front pages, and the VCI on the cover eight times. The swimmer Mireia appeared on the cover twice, once Mireia shared it with the canoeist Maialen Chorrout, once, Lidia Valentín (bronze in weightlifting), once Carolina Marín (gold in badminton) and twice Ruth Beitia (gold in high jump) and a front-page shared among the female handball and basketball teams and beach volleyball pair Liliana Fernández and Elsa Baquerizo. Men's sport appeared on the same number of front pages, although unlike London 2012, only once does an international male athlete appear on the front page: Usain Bolt. The other seven front pages were for Rafa Nadal (two), Nadal and Marc López, one for the canoeist Marcus Cooper, one for Saúl Craviotto, and Cristian Toro from K2 200 and one for Saúl Craviotto. Just like in London 2012, international sportswomen do not earn the spotlight on the front page of the booklet of *Marca* in Rio 2016.

Fig 2: VCI of the front pages of the booklet



Source: created by the author

Therefore, we can observe that in the coverage of men's sport, the sportsman's nationality does not matter as much as his appeal to the audience because of his sporting career (Usain Bolt and Michel Phelps) and his performance in this Olympic event. It is not the case in women's sport: they are the only ones who make the front page because they

are Spanish athletes. Therefore, in *Marca's* coverage of women's sport in the two Olympic events, the sportswomen's Spanish nationality is the main criterion for the news's hierarchy, over and above sporting success. As Moragas (2008:8) highlights, "the popular and audience success of sport is due to three main factors: emotion, spectacularity, and identity."

We have also analysed who the protagonist in the headlines of the front pages featuring national sportswomen is: what relevance is given to these sportswomen, or the country they represent, Spain, which highlights the nationalist triumphalism of the victories.

As can be seen in the headlines of the London 2012 booklet front pages:

And a brave one. Maialen Chorrouts gets second in canoeing and changes the trend of Spanish sport in London (2/08/2012).

Ladies first. Silvia Navarro and Laura Ester, the goalkeepers of handball and water polo, love London (3/08/2012).

The golden pond. Spanish women's Waterpolo makes history as the team makes it to the semi-finals in its Olympic debut (06/08/2012).

Spain makes waves. Alabau, Gómez Noya, the girls of the synchro and water polo water, our best day in London (08/08/2012).

Like fish in water, Spain wins the bronze medal in synchronised swimming with a spectacular staging (11/08/2012).

They are like that. The girls of the Elliot 8 give Spain the third gold, and handball achieves a historic medal (12/08/2012).

Twice, the subject of the headline or subheadline is that Spain achieves victory, so the triumph extends to the whole country: "Spain wins a bronze medal in synchronised swimming..." (11/08/2012), "Spain makes waves" (8/08/2012). Also, in two headlines in the 2016 Olympics: "Spain takes away two golds in the swimming pool..." (12/08/2016) and "Spain puts a finishing touch to the games with the medal of..." (22/08/2016), the subject of the triumph is the athletes country of origin. In the other headlines published in the 2012 and 2016 supplements, the spotlight is on the female athletes.

They are warriors. The female sector garners hope for Spain, adding another fourth place with Castroviejo in cycling and fifth with Bernabéu in judo (11/08/2016).

Mireia shines. Belmonte opens the medallion after a fantastic comeback that leads her to the bronze. The shooter Fatima Galvez, fourth by only one plate (8/08/2016).

Holy water. Spain wins two golds in the swimming pool and whitewater while Nadal and López enter into the doubles finals and ensure one more (12/08/2016).

Raise Spain. Lydia Valentín wins Spain's fourth medal in Rio in weightlifting, and Rafa Nadal earns a spot in the individual tournament semi-finals (13/08/2016).

Triple Crown. Carolina Marín wins Spain's sixth gold while taekwondo remains a mainstay; silver for Calvo and bronze for Joel (20/08/2016).

The final show. Spain puts a pin in the games with Beita, the rhythmic gymnast's, the basketball team's and the mountain biker's Carlos Coloma's medals (22/08/2016).

The women are referred to by their name and surname when they participate in individual events or pairs. And if this is in a team, the women's sport is indicated, as well as their gender, nationality of the team (Spanish women's water polo) or via the generic term "girls" and their sport (the synchro or water polo girls, Elliot's girls, and the handball girls), in the case of the 2012 headlines. Women are treated condescendingly and paternalistically through the noun "girl," which is not the case for male athletes in any of the headlines which refer to them. Thus, the men's football team is referred to as "Spain" or the basketball team with Spain or "the NBA," but the "boys of basketball" or "the boys of handball" are not found. In 2016, as can be seen in the news headlines, *Marca* no longer used this unrecommended way of referring to sportswomen in those Olympic Games. Instead of saying "the girls give Spain hope," the subheadline of the 11 August front page features the women's handball and basketball team, and the volleyball doubles Liliana Fernández and Elsa Baquerizo referring to them as "the female sector"; the front page shows each of them in a photograph and the cover photograph names them.

Regarding photographs of the sportswomen on the front page, there are more of them in action during their sporting event that they have won (4 in 2012 and 8 in 2016) than those where they pose with their medal or celebrate their victory (2 in 2012 and 4 in 2016). The Spanish flag is only present in one in 2016 when Ruth Beitia celebrates her win.

Suppose we quantify the athletes' sport, which received the most coverage in London 2012 and Rio 2016 in *Marca*. In that case, we can see in Fig. 3, 4, and 5 how the sports in which sportswomen won a medal received a logical information follow-up, not only because of the victory but also because they participated in more qualifying events until they achieved a spot on the podium. Even though no medal was won in 2012, many information units were registered in athletics because it includes many disciplines. There had been expectations that Ruth Beitia in the high jump and Marta Domínguez would win a medal that year in the running. Spanish women's basketball is the sport with the most coverage in 2016 (24 news units), given that it is a sport followed widely by audiences. The Spanish team won a silver medal and participated in the Olympic Games after being unable to qualify to participate in the London 2012 Games, so there are no news units on basketball in that Olympic event.

Fig 3: Sports reported on in the news unit in which the protagonists are national sportsmen and women

	2012	2016		2012	2016
Sailing	34	10	Canoeing: open waters	2	5
Swimming	26	19	High jump	1	1
Handball	23	13	Tennis	1	3
Waterpolo	19	5	Table Tennis	1	0
Athletics	12	9	Artistic Gymnastics	1	1
Synchronised swimming	12	6	Several sports in the same news item	13	1

Beach volleyball	6	0	Badminton		12
Canoeing slalom	5	2	Basketball		24
Olympic shooting (sport)	5	2	BMX cycling		1
Equestrian (riding)	4	0	Football		1
Taekwondo	3	0	Golf		2
Greco-Roman wrestling	3	0	Grass Hockey/field hockey		3
Judo	3	4	Rowing		3
Cycling/track	3	2	Rugby		3
Rhythmic gymnastics	2	7	Shooting		1
Weightlifting	2	5	Triathlon		1
Open water swimming	2	1			
TOTAL				183	147

Source: created by the author

Fig 4: Spanish sportswomen medal tally

LONDON 2012	
Gold medals	
Sailing	
Lightweight sailing Elliot 6 m (Match Race)	Tamara Echegoyen / Ángela Pumariiega/ Sofia Toro
Windsurf Rs:X	Marina Alabau
Silver medals	
SWIMMING	
200 m butterfly	Mireia Belmonte
800 m freestyle	Mireia Belmonte
Synchronised Duo	Ona Carbonell / Andrea Fuentes
WATERPOLO	
TAEKWONDO 49 kg Olympic fly Ab	Brígida Yagüe
Bronze medals	
HANDBALL	
OLYMPIC FIGHTING Olympic free 72 kg	Maider Unda
SWIMMING Synchronised team	Team
CANOEING Slalom K-1	Maialen Chourraut

RIO 2016	
Gold medal	
SWIMMING 200 m butterfly	Mireia Belmonte
CANOING Slalom K1	Maialen Chourraut
BADMINTON	Carolina Martín
ATHLETICS High jump	Ruth Beitia
Silver medal	
BASKETBALL	Women's team
RHYTHMIC GYMNASTICS	Women's team
TAEKWONDO Under 75 kg	Eva Calvo
Bronze medal	
SWIMMING 400 m freestyle	Mireia Belmonte
WEIGHTLIFTING 75 KG.	Lidia Valentín

Source: created by the author

The importance of athletes' results in the Olympic Games' coverage can also be seen in the thematic quantification of the registered news units' headlines. The headlines of a sports chronicle, as Néstor Hernández (2003:125), affirms are instruments of semantic concentration and communicative appeal. Therefore, their analysis provides a vision of the issues that the newspaper considers relevant to the information. In the headlines of the news units about national sportswomen (see. Fig. 5), it is verified that more than 50% of the results of their participation is highlighted.

Fig 5. The theme of the headlines in the information units in which Spanish sportswomen are the protagonist's

THEME	2012	2016
Successes, failures, place and medals	92 (50,3%)	76 (51.7%)
The athlete's physical and mental characteristics	17 (9,3%)	13 (8.8%)
Preparation and organisation of the team	17 (9,3%)	12 (8.2%)
Personal issues	14 (7,7%)	14 (9.5%)
Concrete Events	7 (3,8%)	16 (10.9%)
Direct Rivalries	4 (2,2%)	3 (2%)
Economic Aspects of elite sport	3 (1.6%)	---
Sporting careers	3 (1.6%)	6 (4.1%)

Olympic village: daily life	2 (1.1%)	---
Health	1 (0.5%)	4 (2.7%)
Olympic Games: organisation	1 (0.5%)	---
Olympic Games: media coverage	1 (0.5%)	---
Others	21 (11.5%)	3 (2%)
TOTAL	183	147

Source: created by author

5. Women's team Elliot 8 and Carolina Marín: different expectations, different coverage

Tamara Echegoyen, Sofía Toro, and Ángela Pumariega, members of the women's Match Race Team, arrived at Weymouth to participate in the 2012 London Olympic Games, as published in *Marca* 8 August, "under no pressure" (p. 6). Equality and the enormous competition among the crews participating in this event made the predictions about their classification unpredictable. This, together with the fact that the team was formed in May 2009 to participate in a new type of boat for the Match Race, the Elliot, as the journalist Nacho Gómez said on 12 August meant that they were "three girls that nobody recognised a few days ago" (p. 14). Hence, their news value grew as they qualified after each race.

On the contrary, the expectations on the badminton player's Carolina Marín's performance at the beginning of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games were high; the athlete herself stated in the Olympic Park section of the booklet in *Marca* 9 August before starting the competition that, "It is the tournament that I have prepared for the best; I will not win another medal that isn't gold" (p. 11). In London 2012, she had been eliminated in the group phase after being beaten by the Chinese Li Xuerui, the gold medal winner of those Olympic Games. But on 31 August 2014, Marín beat this athlete in the individual final in the World Badminton Championships and became the first Spanish woman to win the world title and the third European player to win gold after Lene Koppen (1977) and Camilla Martin (1999). At only 21, she became the youngest European world champion. After several victories in different championships and Superseries, she became world number one in June 2015.

5.1. The "normal little girls" of Elliot 8 (Match Race)

The texts published on the first races of the women's Elliot 8 (August 2, 5, 6, and 8), all less than half a page long, affect the results. There is a brief description of the race, indicating what the next race after winning that one would be. But there is no reference to the team's qualities as sportswomen. Neither do the photographs offer any identifying information about the athletes: the whole scene of their boat during some part of the race. What is pointed out is that the three "continue to be the most pleasant surprise for Spain's interests in the Weymouth racecourse" (02/08/ p.18). That is why

their news importance grew as they qualified after each race. It is not until 9 August, already qualified for the semi-final, when a full shot is published with a Portuguese sailor friend. Tamara Echegoyen provides some of the keys to her team's success: her calmness and speed in the stern. On 10 August, *Marca* dedicates a full page to the multidiscipline sailing team. The report describes the sailing team's village and the sportsmen and women's daily life in it as women became references in an elite sport in 2012. The report shows the motivational phrases and large photographs of some national and international sports idols –Pau Gasol, Rafa Nadal, Miguel Indurain, Alberto Contador, Usain Bolt, or Mohammed Ali–. There are no photos of sportswomen in the team's village. On 11 August, once Elliot's women's team reached the final, the newspaper dedicates a page and a half to them. Still, the three athletes do not take up the photographs and information. The boat (Elliot) and the song they motivate themselves with at the start of every day at the Olympic Games take up the information, even though it had already appeared in the newspaper the day before.

The ghost ship

Match Race. Tamara Echegoyen, Sofía Toro, and Ángela Pumariéga place Spain in the final of the newest and ethereal sailing competition class. The Elliot 6 m is born and dies in the 2010 Games.

The crazy pod's secret

A video of Van Damme with a reggaeton music base motivates our medalists daily.

Only a few lines about their performance in two of the inside covers are provided about the sportswomen. The text refers to how amazed Sofía Toro, a supporter of Déport, was when a player of that club, Juan Carlos Valerón, called her; and he congratulated her and her teammates on their performance: “Both Sofía and her teammates Tamara Echegoyen and Ángela Pumariéga are going to have to get used to having similar experiences [referring to Valerón's congratulations] or much better ones from now on because yesterday they got into the Olympic Games final,” the journalist wrote (11/08 p. 18).

As gold medal winners, *Marca* notably increased the space dedicated to Tamara Echegoyen, Sofía Toro, and Ángela Pumariéga *Marca* to 3 pages. Still, again, they do not directly appear in the headlines: “The plastic boat turned into gold” (p. 12), “Defying physics” (p. 13), and “The lucky cap” (p. 14). They only manage to do so in Nacho Gómez's profile about them on the last page with the headline: “Normal little girls.” The three athletes are in the spotlight in the images: in one shot, they are on the podium with their medals; in another, they are racing in the regatta, but the women themselves are the centre of visual attention in the image, not the boat, and there is a third medium shot of the three celebrating their victory in the Olympic final.

Every day they compete, the news's daily headlines refer to them either by their surnames and the country they represent (“Spain is one win away from the semi-finals” 8/08 p. 6). They are also referred to as the girls from match race instead of identifying them as “the women's match race team.” The sports discipline is included in the news in the London 2012 Sailing with “Match Race. Even though there is no Spanish men's team in this sport, if the adjective “female” were

written on the banner next to “Match Race,” it would help to make the female athlete’s participation in this sport visible to readers. In others, journalists do not include the gender of the sports discipline with almost any sport.

5.2. Carolina Marín’s and her coach’s sporting and news reign

The space given to women’s badminton is more significant than that given to other sports in *Marca* in the 2016 Olympic Games because of the high expectations for Marín to win gold, even those sports in which a precious metal is won are not given much space. Referring to Carolina Marín as a “champion,” “two-time champion,” or as a “double world champion” or “top favorite to win gold” is a constant in the texts that *Marca* publishes about her sports performance. Marín’s status in her sport is reflected in the headlines in the information after each match: “Carolina is number one. The world champion’s display against the Korean Sung to reach semi-finals” (17/08/p. 13); “Carolina strokes the gold” (19/08 p. 9).

The sportswoman appears in medium shots. She gesticulates in her characteristic and rehearsed gestures: her arm raised and her fist energetically closed while crying out in rage. This is how she celebrates each point; she wants her opponents to visualise that she is giving it her all. *Marca* presents Marín to its readers in the images published of her. This position at the “starting line” of the competition as a favourite means that even before Carolina Marín’s debut in Rio, *Marca* dedicates 5 full columns on page 12, two photographs and refers to her in the headline as the champion (“The champion’s secrets”), and in “The two-time world champion begins her path towards the triple crown today” (11/08 p. 12) in the headlines referring to the quarter-finals.

Nevertheless, Marín’s coach, Fernando Rivas, is in the spotlight, as he is the one who is credited with “having made a world super champion with his methods” in that first text on 11 August in the newspaper. The key to Carolina’s success lies in innovation: “a lot of work and the continuous search for new formulas. Fernando Rivas has his badminton R&D department in a way; his formula has become a world reference” (11/08 p. 12).

The report begins by referring to him: “Each time Fernando Rivas says to Carolina: ‘I have an idea. Let’s try it out’, the Huelva native trembles” Rivas’ original methods are revealed throughout the report. The only thing that is said about Marín in the text and summary is that she has cried in some training sessions because it had been so hard. It is only in the quarter-finals when the sportswoman is praised by her coach: “Carolina does not have natural talent. Rather she has been forged through work. She is a champion because of her winning mentality, which makes her different”. A strength that the journalist Almudena Rivera again refers to on 20 August once Marín has already won gold: “A beautiful mind” (Headline); “Motivation. Carolina works on her mental strength” (subheadline). Her most important quality stands out in the texts that *Marca* publishes about her: her work ethic to achieve what she has set out to do: win the Olympic gold. “I can because I think I can” is her motto.

The gold that Marín is expected to win is not just another medal for her or Spain: it would mean that the Spanish player would win the triple “crown” in badminton, as European, world, and Olympic champion. It would also be a historic medal for Spain by being the first Olympic medal in Spanish badminton but, in particular, for being the first to be won

by a non-Asian player. All this means that her rivals are given importance in the chronicles, especially the South Korean Sung Ji Hyun and the Chinese Li Xuerui, and to the Spanish athlete's victory, which is felt with national pride. Thus, the chronicle's major headline about the women's badminton final, which occupies two lines, is "Carolina of Spain" (20/08/2016, p. 8) under a seven-column image of the athlete with open arms and holding a flag.

In the next column next to this image, there are three photographs of the sportswoman celebrating her win according to the newspaper- the Nadal way: "Carolina Marín has always acknowledged her admiration for the tennis player. Yesterday her celebration on the court after winning the gold medal reminded us of the Manacori (20/08 p. 9). As was the case with the Spanish sailing team, the female athletes' reference is a male athlete. *Marca* highlights this in its chronicle.

Fernando Rivas is also a reference, once again a profile on him in which his importance in Marín's victory is highlighted.

"He studied methods to get the best performance out of Carolina, a diamond in the rough he has been polishing for nine years. His methodic way of working, disciplined and analytical, in which every detail counts, is the secret to a Spanish woman's success among Asians and has placed Spain on the Badminton World map. Innovation has been key. Steering away from tradition. He has become a reference".

Carolina's performance in Rio 2016 has the potential to make her a sporting reference for her generation. As the journalist Almudena Rivera indicates in her chronicle, "Thanks to her successes, Spain has discovered that it is much more than a sport played at school or on the beach." However, the journalist once again highlights male athletes: "Her feat [referring to Marín] is on par with pioneers of the stature of Manolo Santana in tennis, Severiano Ballesteros in golf or Ángel Nieto in motorcycling.

6. Conclusions

Elite athletes become national heroes, a source of pride for their country, role models, and sporting references, mainly when they compete and win a medal. The media plays an essential role in this transformation, strengthening athletes' status through extensive news coverage of their achievements. This research aims to verify whether this was the case with Spanish women's sport in the London 2012 and Rio 2016 Olympic Games, in which sportswomen achieved better results (more medals) than their male counterparts.

After the analyses, it was observed that the news value of sporting success meant that *Marca* covered the women's performance extensively, focusing on the results obtained in the different events and the sportswomen's preparation. Nevertheless, the press focuses more on the value of the sportswomen's nationality and the expectations to succeed than winning a medal. Thus, if Spanish female athletes are likely to win a medal in a competition, it is reported beforehand. Even if they do not win a medal, their performance is covered more extensively than the gold medal won by international athletes. Similarly, Spanish athletes are the center of the visual impact of several covers of the supplements, while international athletes do not star in any of them-

The same is not the case; however, for men's sports. Analysis of the covers shows us that, regardless of the athlete's nationality, they appear on the front page because they are sporting references. This leads us to the second conclusion: sports heroes' status is still hegemonically male, as Giuliano et al. reported in 2007. Although the content analysis of the texts allows us to affirm that in women's sports news coverage, sportswomen are trivialised by accentuating their physical attractiveness, feminine traits, or personal lives, as could be seen in the past in some media, they continue to hold a place on the Olympic podium. The athletes have managed to add medals to the Spanish medal tally with their sporting success and increase national pride during the Olympic Games. As can be seen in *Marca's* information in the days before the start of the Rio 2016 Games and the reports on the women's Elliot 8 team and Carolina Marín, the female athletes' inspiring role models are still male athletes.

The content analysis and critical reading of the selected news samples have allowed us to investigate the journalistic treatment of women's sports success in the context of the Olympic Games. Future research would be relevant to compare these results by using methodological tools such as in-depth focus groups or surveys with sports newspapers' managers and journalists.

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