

AESTHETICS IN SPORT: ICONOGRAPHIC NOTES ON TWO “STARS” - ANA KOURNIKOVA AND DAVID BECKHAM

Rosane Maria Bazotti Sebrenski

Centro Universitário Positivo, Curitiba, Paraná, Brasil

André Mendes Capraro

Universidade Federal do Paraná, Curitiba, Paraná, Brasil

Fernando Renato Cavichioli

Universidade Federal do Paraná, Curitiba, Paraná, Brasil

Abstract

What is the relation between aesthetics and sport? Beauty surpasses fashion and cinema's boundaries, reaching sports. It doesn't seem enough to be just an athlete, but also to be beautiful and, therefore, to have a considerable appearance in the media. It is the highlight of aesthetics in the composition of a spectacle and of sports. Sport is then a celebration influenced by the conception of beauty. Through the public image of two athletes, the Russian tennis player Anna Kournikova and the English soccer player David Beckham, we sought to understand the trinomial aesthetics – sport – media. What beforehand can be said is that the corporal exposure of athletes is evident: some posing nude; some acting as models, influencing collection of designers' brands, in other words, being highlighted by their physical beauty.

Keywords: Sport - Aesthetics - Media

Introduction – Athlete, image and consumerism

In the second half of the 20th century, the cult of the body achieved an unprecedented social dimension: entered the era of mass, industrialization and commercialization; spread rules and images; professionalized the esthetic ideal; and highlighted the care of the body, especially the face. Consequently, media has started exploiting it, turning the appearance into an essential condition of identity. In this context, bodies emerge obsessed by the illusion of physical perfection, overwhelmed by image proliferation, by therapeutic ideologies and by consumerism (GOLDEMBERG, 2002, p. 08).

In this sense, as a practice of extolment of body effort, it also become a target of many different media resources, informing and nurturing collective imagination, enhancing mythical dreams – of becoming a given athlete, of having his/her success, of having his/her

fortune, of having his/her body and ability, therefore, supporting the interpretation of the world.

Copious perspiration, physical effort, emotions touched, a lot of competitions, rivalry declared, toned muscles, making impressive gestures, freedom of movement, lightness of clothes and the highlight of body's trace, are all common practices in the world of body culture (GOELLNER, 2007). Based on these general findings, this article aimed to analyze the nuances on aesthetics, sport and media from the iconography of two specific cases: the soccer player David Beckham and the ex-tennis player Anna Kournikova.

David Beckham, a Hollywood athlete

The quotidian is considered a gifted place for mediation to occur and for people allow themselves to get involved; there are moments when an athlete is no longer only a sportsman/woman, becoming a celebrity as well. Having media as co-participant, which recreates personae who identify themselves with this quotidian. Thus, one can believe that messages are produced from a hegemonic standard, from a cultural reality in which one seeks to link the image of an athlete to the care with body through the consumerism.

Then, assuming the premise that athletes are the main references of this hegemonic scenario, it is not surprising that the image privileged by media is the one who stands beauty out, the one which highlights the perfection of body and performance. One notorious case, perhaps the greatest of all, is the English soccer player David Beckham.

As an example, related to the association with masculine and athletic image, we can use the new campaign (June, 2009) of the renowned Italian fashion brand, Giorgio Armani. In a widely circulated video, mainly on the Internet, the brand does the fancy launching of a giant outdoor in which the athlete appears wearing only underwear. Approximately 300 people crowded at the door of Selfridges' store on Oxford Street, London, in order to watch the launching of the advertisement of underwear starred by the player¹.

This advertisement raises the esthetic image of the soccer player. Emphasizing his sensuality, Beckham is presented tied to a ship's rope, showing his tattoos and a hairstyle (one of the athlete's personal

1-Data extracted from <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USDZVPujtTA>>. Accessed: 07/01/2009

brand). “I do not mind taking pictures in underwear. However, when they show the pictures I feel I bit embarrassed.”, said the sportsman. The stylist Giorgio Armani declared: “David has a fantastic style; he is such an inspiration as a model. He is the perfect man for Armani’s underwear”².

This association to a body anatomically “perfect” (remembering that pictures have a strong technological treatment) transcends the product image, highlighting with more autonomy the athlete’s body instead of the sale of the product, as a manner of exhibit, as a manner of making media, as a manner of highlight different instances of his body, turning person-body into body-object. Dickel, Borelli and Fausto Neto (2001) state that athletes’ body are built from physiological training technology, linked to the concept of aesthetics and masculine courage, which comes from Ancient Greece to contemporary: a strong body outlined by its curves.

The use of sports personalities to promote brands is not a current fact. It has started in the United States in 1960/70. Since then, Sport is not just seemed as an entertainment, club, but as a source of income to business. The strategy is very clear: “[...] the athlete lends his/her image to a company, and this company promotes an association between product and idol, increasing its sales and making its brand stronger” (MENEZES, 2005, s/p), because, in general, athletes are very efficient endorsing products, brands and sports equipment. In this sense, sports’ stars are very present in peoples’ mind that everything they do, wear, eat and consume becomes a model to be followed by everyone. “The soccer idols are admired not just by what they do on the soccer field, but mainly for what they do outside it” (SILVA, 2005, p. 33).

The soccer player David Beckham can be considered a notorious example. Everything he wears becomes fashion. Besides his visibility as an athlete that helped him in sports for many years, he is also a phenomenon in the media. His image is associated to fashion because he only wears modern and luxurious clothes signed by one of the most influent stylist on the world. The evidences are the constant advertising campaigns on fashion magazines of huge sales around the world:

2-Data extracted from http://dn.sapo.pt/inicio/pessoas/interior.aspx?content_id=1262071. Accessed: 07/07/2009



Fig.01 to 06 – Images – David Beckham in different ad campaigns on magazines and fashion websites. (David Beckham. Available at: <<http://www.starmometer.com>>. Accessed: 06/12/2007)

The soccer player was considered by Glamour magazine the most elegant man in the world; in addition to be a beautiful and vain man, rich and desired. His own marriage projects his condition of celebrity, since his wife is a model and ex-Spice Girl, Victoria, another “star” in the art world and one of the most wanted celebrities of the world. This union made the couple the favorite one in sensationalistic issues on British tabloids, and, in terms of commercials/advertisements, they created one more possibility: products’ sales in couple.

For example, David and Victoria Beckham signed some fragrances of perfume producer Coty. The pictures of the campaign below emphasize the seduction and sensuality of the couple. Therefore, it universalizes consumerism, since even those who do not like sports buy products and are interested in them.



Fig. 07 and 08 – Images – David and Victoria Beckham in an ad campaign of Intimately perfumes from Coty's brand. (Intimately Beckham Man and Woman. Available at: <http://www.mimifroufrou.com/scentedsalamander/2008/01/intimately_beckham_night_men_i.html>. Accessed: 07/15/2009)

All entertainment industries, from music to sports (or both, as the couple represents), creates their “stars.” Moreover, they even create projection and identity mechanisms. According to Ferrés (1998), often the own “stars” and not the characters who face anxiety, desires, expectations, dreams and ideals of the spectators; therefore, it is about a symbiotic relation. In the words of the author himself,

These are examples of associations and transfers that complete themselves when everything that a star or a character represents is transferred to the spectator. It is a new transfer process which goes from the association of physical beauty to moral beauty, in the manner that the spectator assumes that the star represents ethics, and ideologically from what he/she represents emotionally. [...] If messages of a medium consist fundamentally of the effects that they produce, it seems evident that one of the fundamental messages produced by media is the mimesis that they induce to, from the seduction their stars exert, and from the identity process and projection they activate. (FERRÉS, 1998, p. 114).

In July, 2003, Beckham left the English team Manchester United and went to the Spanish team Real Madrid. It was a project to make the Spanish team widely known. Called “the galactics”, in addition to

Beckham, the team had other sports celebrities like (Brazil), Zidane (France), Figo (Portugal), Raul (Spain), among others. In the same year, the athlete received a package from Queen Elizabeth II, as thanks for his contribution to the English soccer³.

After the results which did not meet the expectations of Madrid supporters, but that, from marketing perspective, were excellent to the Spanish club (new sponsors, more media exposure, sales of t-shirts printed with the name of the star and contracts for friendly matches), Beckham left Real Madrid, in 2007, in order to sign a millionaire contract with the American team Los Angeles Galaxy. His arrival in USA had a huge impact and all tickets for the season matches were sold out. In 2008, he was loaned to Milan from Italy – with a view to the project of market expansion of the Italian team – returning to L. A. Galaxy to fulfill the current contract until the end of 2009 season.

The course of Beckham's career presents a purposeful direction: the fame. Part of the recognition in his country, England; raising the global recognition when passing through Spain; reaching its market peak (although in visible technical decline, as he turned into 34 years old in 2009) in ideal places to any applicant a world celebrity: Los Angeles, specifically under the "spotlight" of Hollywood and the fashion capital, Milan city. In addition, David Beckham gradually raises his condition of sportsman whose marketing representation is associated to beauty, success and fame; therefore, being of interest for many companies (CANCLINI, 1995, p. 35).

Nowadays (2009), he has as official sponsors: Adidas, Cabo de São Roque Resort, Coty, Emporium Armani, Sharpie, and Motorola. He calls attention to Cabo São Roque Resort, located in Brazil's nearest part of Africa and Europe, in the North part of Natal city. In this place, there is an innovative enterprise: the first soccer training center, David Beckham World of Sport (besides Rubens Barrichello Driving Experience).

Using and stimulating his passage through USA, sports brand from Europe Adidas tries, when sponsoring Los Angeles Galaxy, to launch a new sport line that takes American market, widely dominated by Nike. The company's goal, supported by Beckham's image, was to make an update of the classic American sports, with contemporary

3-Data extracted from <<http://revistaquem.globo.com/Revista/Quem/0,,EBC30-9530,00.html>>. Accessed: 06/18/2009.

proportions.

Beckham, when passing through America, was also the protagonist of a TV commercial from pens brand Sharpie. The advertisement campaign shows him using lots of pens to sign unusual items to his fans⁴. This brand has a long history sponsoring sports in USA, although, when using his image, the company was attempting to expand sales in other markets, mainly in the English one⁵.



Fig. 09 – Image – Beckham giving autographs in a new campaign of Sharpie. (SPORT MARKETING. Available at: <<http://www.sportmarketing.com.br/2008/07/david-beckham-grava-comerciais-de.html>> Accessed: 06/18/2009).

Fig. 10 to 12 – Images – Beckham in Adidas campaign. (Ego – Globo.com. Available at: <<http://ego.globo.com/Gente/Noticias/0,,MUL771414-9798,00-html>>. Accessed: 06/18/2009).

The representation of universal athlete-model enables David Beckham image to be used to reach different areas of the market, as in the cases above – European company which aims at entering American

4-Data extracted from <<http://www.prnewswire.com/mnr/sharpie/32858/>>. Accessed: 07/08/2009.

5-Data extracted from <<http://www.sportmarketing.com.br/2008/07/david-beckham-grava-comerciais-de.html>> Accessed: 06/16/2009.

market, as well as American company which aims at expand its sales in the European market. As stated, “[...] the winner image of the athlete reached through sport is transferred to the company, brand which invests in the athlete, exerting a great influence on the behavior of the target” (MENEZES, 2005, s/p).

Although the relation between advertising and image use of an athlete is relatively current, another association, that between athletic body and physical beauty, it refers to Ancient Greece. The Discobolus of Myron, a Greco-Roman sculpture, was chosen as a symbol of athletic beauty because it represents sports strength, plastic and dynamism; therefore, it is based on movements from human body in action. This sculpture, nowadays found at Museo Nazionale Romano, is probably the most perfect celebration of vitality expressed artistically. As well reviewed by an art critic: “[...] the body reveals a careful study of all muscular movements, tendons and bones that are part of the action; the legs, the arms and the torso incline to give a higher motion to the hit; the face does not seem contorted by effort, but calm and confident of victory” (GOMBRICH, 1999, p. 90-105).



Fig.13 – Image – Discobolus Myron 460-450 b.C. (Discobolus of Myron. Available at: <<http://www.paideuma.net/fig.3j.htm>> Accessed: 06/12/2007).

Fig.14 and 15 – Images – Beckham posing still besides the sculpture. (Beckham. Available at: <<http://lorraine-berry.blogspot.com/>> Accessed: 06/12/2007).

It would be inevitable the comparison between Discobolus and David Beckham. In the pictures above, the athlete reproduces almost similarly the famous Greco-Roman sculpture (left side). The pose

highlights the anatomic forms and the body, therefore, it starts working “[...] as classification system operator and social hierarchy, as its attributes like body form and appearance he shows are raised to criteria which state and enrich, differently, life styles in the contemporary culture” (GONÇALVES; AZEVEDO, 2008, s/p).

David Beckham’s body reframed, in this particular case, wins outline of myth. Then, it calls the attention of media, since it joins significant potential to raise brands’ names and products from a number of areas. Armed with a body carved by training, prestige and fame, besides good example, he becomes a perfect image to advertisements.

Anna Kournikova, ex-athlete and fashion model

As a child, Anna Kournikova became a promise of Russian tennis. Aiming at improving her technique, she moved to USA when she was just 11 years old. After achieving good results in the competitions for amateurs, she became a professional when she was 18 years old. However, the condition of phenomenon did not work. She only won tournaments in doubles and appeared quickly as the tenth in the individual ranking. Nevertheless, with her participation in tournaments in the professional circuit, Anna raised media and audience interest for her physical attributes, working in parallel, as fashion model among others jobs related to fashion. Soon, such activities turned her into one of the most known tennis player. In 2003, aged 22, she completed her career as a tennis player under the statement that many injuries prevented her from playing. Of course, the jobs as a model continued.

Even until today, she is considered one of the most popular tennis player around the world (many fans of tennis do not know that she abandoned her sports career in 2003) due to her physical beauty. A prove of it is a research published on June, 19th 2009, in Britain, three days before the traditional Wimbledon tournament starts, which pointed the Russian Anna Kournikova as the most sexy tennis player of all times⁶.

And even during the period when Anna Kournikova was a professional athlete, the registered images highlight even more her sensuality instead of her performance, as the images presented below.

6- Data extracted from <http://www.ansa.it/ansalatinabr/notizie/fdg/200906191911349382/200906191911349382.html>. Accessed: 07/30/2009.



Fig. 16 – Image – Anna Kournikova stretching up. (Hot Tennis Players. Available at: <<http://www.hottennisplayers.com.au/>>. Accessed: 08/07/2009).

Fig. 17 – Image – Anna Kournikova during a match. (Art.com. Available at: <www.art.com/.../-anna-kournikova.htm>. Accessed: 08/07/2009).

Como afirmado, a ex-tenista se aposentou das quadras, mas não da carreira de modelo. Sua agenda é bastante cheia, desde desfiles de moda e presença em festas badaladas até os constantes trabalhos fotográficos para revistas e sites especializados em moda ou no público masculino ou “até” em esportes (como na sequência de imagens abaixo):



Fig. 18 – Image – Anna Kournikova, Maxim magazine cover. (Maxim. Available at: <<http://www.maxim.com>>. Accessed: 08/01/2009).

Fig. 19 – Image – Anna Kournikova, Sports Illustrated magazine cover. (Sports Illustrated. Available at: <www.sportsillustrated.cnn.com>. Accessed: 08/07/2009).

In addition to sensual photos, such performances are turned into videos with the making offs of photographic rehearsals in sensual poses, as the one made to Maxim⁷ magazine. Another activity performed by Anna Kournikova is as a promoter, attending events, such as tennis, soccer, charity events or even a party to launch a car. In this sort of event, the contract generally involves both, she and her fiancée, the Latin singer Enrique Iglesias. It is something similar, but in smaller proportion, of what occurs to David and Victoria Beckham, as previously mentioned.



Fig. 20 and 21 – Image – Anna Kournikova and Enrique Iglesias in a social event. (Hot Tennis Players. Available at: <<http://www.hottennisplayers.com.au/>>. Accessed: 08/07/2009).

The fact that individuals, as Kournikova and Iglesias, are hired only to perform as celebrities guess is a clear demonstration of the process of ritualization of appearance.

[...] the appearance is the visible part a person offers to the sensorial perception of the other, and all social act using appear-

7-Data extracted from <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ytQCIXhXTmk>>. Accessed: 12/06/2008.

ance occurs in a social environment. It penetrates, then, inside the physical appearance to show that the body works as a true currency in social relations. (GOLDEMBERG, 2002, p. 117).

During her sports career, Kournikova had a considerable number of sponsors and made numerous advertising campaigns, as the one from the sports brand Adidas – by the way, the same as David Beckham. However, after having finally given up professional tennis and have assumed her career as a model, the links, considering advertising campaigns, have also been changed. Currently, the official website of the ex-tennis player presents the following companies as partners: K-Swiss, company of sports and daily shoes; Octagon, marketing agency; United Talent Agency, model agency; Rogers & Cowan, advertising agency; Cartoon Network, pay-TV channel which displays gym videos of the ex-tennis player; Microsoft and Sportsmates, business managers of websites.

The attention is drawn by the last “partner” company of Anna Kournikova, World Team Tennis (WTT), company specialized in making matches of ex-tennis player as an exhibition. Anna Kournikova, even before the end of her career, privileged exhibition games, in which there already was a pre-defined payment, leaving the risk of bigger professional tennis competitions that award according to the placement of the player. These friendly matches with the participation of Anna Kournikova are organized by this company for almost a decade. Clearly, the target audience of such matches is men and not the player’s performance as the main point. Therefore, it is correct the statement of Goldemberg (2002) that some athletes rely almost entirely on physical esthetical values and that – due to the decay of traditional means of produce identities (family, state, religion, school, etc.) – these means influence the receptors (fans) to accredit as a condition of success only the beautiful image.

Two aspects are unique when considering the career of this ex-tennis player: the first is relatively the lower technical performance. Anna, in her fast career as professional, has never been a prominent player. However, even without reaching the actions of others tennis player of her time, her fame and her advertisement contracts surpassed lots of her sports’ rivals. Such condition is not conventional, and even when it highlights beautiful athletes, an intrinsic need to the success was to be a good player. In this sense, Anna Kournikova is an excep-

tion.

The second aspect is the prioritization of the career as a model instead of as a professional player. Generally, the greatest names in sports – even when considered the most beautiful ones, as David Beckham – even having innumerable advertising jobs, are those who still put their sports career in first plan. Kournikova is an opposite radical example, because, only aged 23, she has given up tennis probably because she could not reconcile this practice with her model activities. An evidence of it is, in a given occasion, when asked if the mediocre performance on the courts was not because her lower fitness, since she almost did not have time to train, she answered: “If you see me naked, you would know that my body is in perfect shape and ready to conquer the world”⁸.

Final Considerations

Few athletes can be considered sports’ “stars” because, besides physical performance, it is necessary to have a good body image. This small group of athletes is fundamental to publicity, since they bridge the gap between brands and its respective products and the idea of health, beauty, fulfillment and victory. In some cases, publicity is not focused on the product, but focused on the celebrity, who allows it. It is found in sports the opportunity to turn athletes into exhibitors of desires of consumerism. Furthermore, it raises the athlete condition of a super-human. Thus, the career, many times, does not stick to physical practice, but also to the maintenance of a beautiful, well-succeeded and uninhibited image.

David Beckham is probably the world’s best example of how an athlete of good technical/tactical performance and considerable beauty, consequently, tends to become a celebrity. However, Anna Kournikova is a specific case, since her career as an athlete was prematurely ended due to her model career. Thus, it proves that media agents, in the last decades, have acquired enough power to create a “sports celebrity”, even though this person hasn’t achieved any significant results in sports. Radically, sports become just an accessory that provides an exotic tone to the model image.

8-Data extracted from <<http://www.nexus.ao/sports/galerias/ver.cfm?mid=23>>. Accessed: 12/15/2006.

The eye of the whole world turned to athletes. Athletes' exposure is bigger and bigger, due to the emphasis of TV transmissions and the development of other media, such as Internet (BAUMAN, 2001, p. 95). It is possible to identify them posing nude or in sensual positions, acting as models, influencing collections of important brands, being extolled by their physical beauty.

Thus, companies and brands are used to privileged this area, taking advantage of the athletes' good image with the audience:

Due to the values attributed to sports such as courage, health, in addition to personal achievements of lots of athletes, they make the sports marketing a bridge to relate these values to a company, to a brand or product. Generally, the results are extremely gratifying because they exhibit to the consumer society a strong and consistent positive image, which increases sales products associated to athletes and winner teams. (POIT, 2004, p. 54).

Ultimately, it is believed that, in the next years, there will be an increase of the communion among sports "stars", advertising and fashion world. And this relation will become more and more multifaceted, complex, and interpenetrated by contractual arrangements that transcend sports environment. David Beckham, for example, notoriously after consolidating his relation with his sponsor, Adidas, preferred to sign contracts with team sponsored by the German brand. Anna Kournikova, when still working as a professional tennis player, had the diagnosis that was necessary a hypertrophy work (gain of muscle mass) to improve her performance in sport. Contrite, she preferred not to do this physical treatment because she was afraid of the changes in her body could affect her advertising contracts.

The common ground to the presented cases, and probably to those that might appear, is the extolment of the body. The body planned in a superficial and objective way (typical characteristics of consumerism) from measures as physical beauty and joviality. The sport-show, more than ever, raises its commercial and globalized side (HALL, 2002, p. 75). The athletes-celebrities carry, over their image, many brands of multinational companies.

Bibliographic references

BAUMAN, Z. **Modernidade líquida**. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2001.

CANCLINI, N. G. **Consumidores e cidadãos: conflitos multiculturais em um mundo globalizado**. Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ, 1995.

DICKEL, D.; BORELLI, V.; FAUSTO NETO, A. Algumas reflexões teóricas sobre a representação do corpo. **Revista Comunicação Movimento e Mídia na Educação Física**. Centro de Educação Física e Desporto da Universidade Federal de Santa Maria. UFSM, 1993. v. 6, n. 7 jan./dez. 2001.

FERRÉS, J. **Televisão subliminar: socializando através de comunicações despercebidas**. Tradução Ernani Rosa e Beatriz A. Neves. Porto Alegre: Artmed, 1998.

GOELLNER, S. V. O esporte e a espetacularização dos corpos femininos. **Revista Estudos Feministas**. Florianópolis-SC. UFSC, n. 4. ago./dez. 2003. Disponível em: <<http://www.unb.br/ih/his/gefem/labrys4/textos/silvana1.htm>> Acesso em: 29 mar. 2007.

GOLDEMBERG, M. **Nu & vestido: Org.** Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2002.

GOMBRICH, E. **A história da arte**. Tradução Álvaro Cabral. 16 ed. Rio de Janeiro: LTC Editora S. A., 1999.

GONÇALVES, A. S. AZEVEDO, A. A. O corpo na contemporaneidade: a Educação Física escolar pode ressignificá-lo? **Revista da Educação Física/ Universidade Estadual de Maringá**. Maringá-PR, v. 19, n. 1, p. 119-130, 1. trim. 2008. Disponível em: <<http://www.periodicos.uem.br/ojs/index.php/RevEducFis/article/view/4322/2924>> Acesso em: 24 jun. 2009.

HALL, S. **Identidades culturais na pós-modernidade**. Rio de Janeiro: DP&A, 2002.

MENEZES, S. L. **Rogério Ceni: o goleiro artilheiro**. Juiz de Fora: UFJF; FACOM. Projeto experimental do Curso de Comunicação Social. 02. sem. 2005.

POIT, D. R. **Organização de eventos esportivos**. 3. ed. São Paulo: Phorte, 2004.

SILVA, M. D. de S. **O poder da imagem no futebol**: estudo de caso do jogador Rivaldo. Juiz de Fora: UFJF; FACOM. Projeto Experimental do Curso de Comunicação Social. 01 sem. 2005.

Recebido em: 03/05/2009

Revisado em: 11/09/2009

Aprovado em: 12/09/2009

Endereço para correspondência

andrecapraro@hotmail.com

André Mendes Capraro

Universidade Federal do Paraná, Departamento de Educação Física.

Rua Coração de Maria, 92 - BR 116 km 95

Campo Comprido

80215-370 - Curitiba, PR - Brasil