

Hegemonic Cycles in International Volleyball. A Sociological Reading

Giovanni Carrosio

Abstract

This paper analyses the historical succession of national hegemonies in world volleyball from 1949 to 2025, reconstructing men's and women's cycles on the basis of medal records at the Olympic Games, World Championships, and World Cup. The thesis advanced is that hegemonic cycles reflect a succession of national configurations that prove institutionally optimal in relation to the historical conditions of the global arena in which they operate. Each hegemony is not the product of a single generation of talent or of a great coach, but the outcome of the encounter between a specific institutional configuration of the national system and a specific configuration of the international arena (regulations, labour market, geopolitics, technological conditions). When the conditions of the arena change, the hegemony declines, not because the national system deteriorates, but because its configuration ceases to be optimal in the new context. The paper finally argues that the contemporary phase is a phase of structural multipolarity rather than a transitional interregnum, and that this multipolarity is itself a feature of the current global configuration.

Keywords

Sociology of sport, Volleyball, Hegemonic cycles, Varieties of capitalism, Globalization, Institutionalism

GIOVANNI CARROSIO, Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Trieste, Piazzale Europa 1, 34127 Trieste, Italy, e-mail: gcarrosio@units.it, ORCID: 0000-0003-2402-2645

1. Introduction

The history of international volleyball over the past seventy years presents an orderly succession of national hegemonies, each with its own physiognomy, its own duration, and its own moment of rise and decline. On the women's side, the Japanese national team in the 1960s and early 1970s, the Soviet team between the 1970s and 1980s, the Cuban team in the 1990s, the Brazilian team in the first decade of the 2000s, the Chinese team in the 2010s, and the recent irruption of Italy, Turkey, and the United States at the top compose a clear chronological pattern. On the men's side, the long Soviet hegemony spanning the 1950s through the 1970s gives way to more contested phases: Italian dominance in the 1990s, Brazilian hegemony between 2002 and 2016, and the multipolarity of the contemporary phase. This sequence is not the product of chance or of contingent factors such as the presence of a great coach or a fortunate generation of athletes. It is, we argue in this paper, the product of a structural logic.

The thesis advanced is the following: hegemonic cycles reflect a succession of national configurations that prove optimal in relation to the changing conditions of the global arena. Each hegemony, in other words, is the outcome of the encounter between a specific institutional configuration of the national volleyball system - type of funding, relationship between federation and clubs, model of talent development, territorial embeddedness, position in global flows - and a specific configuration of the international arena, composed of regulations, the structure of competitions, the labour market, geopolitical conditions, and the prevailing technical paradigm. A hegemony emerges when a national configuration provides a decisive comparative advantage with respect to the conditions of the arena at the time. It declines when the conditions of the arena change in ways that reward different configurations.

This reading shifts the analytical focus from micro-level factors - talent, coaches, generations - to macro-level factors: institutional configurations, conditions of the global volleyball arena, historical complementarities. Without denying the importance of the former, it maintains that great coaches and exceptional generations of talent are made possible, recognisable, and exploitable only within configurations that already predispose to them. Eugenio George could produce his legend because the Cuban EIDE system existed (*Escuela de Iniciación Deportiva Escolar*); Bernardo Rezende could do so because the Brazilian federal apparatus of the CBV existed (*Confederação Brasileira de Voleibol*), with its dual indoor-beach specialisation; Julio Velasco and Yasutaka Matsudaira, in their respective historical cycles (Italian in the 1990s, Japanese in the 1970s), operated within specific institutional configurations that enabled their action. The same applies, in negative, to hegemonies that fail to consolidate: the Italian men's team, despite winning numerous World Championships and club Champions Leagues,

has never claimed an Olympic gold medal: a fact that, as we shall see, the configuration of the Italian system explains better than any argument based on individual episodes.

The paper is organised so as to articulate the thesis through several steps. Section 2 sets out the theoretical framework, built at the intersection of four traditions: the comparative sociology of national capitalisms (Hall and Soskice 2001), the sociology of historical-world hegemonies (Arrighi 1994), the sociology of fields (Bourdieu 1988, 1993), and the sociology of globalised sport (Maguire 1994; 1999; Giulianotti and Robertson 2013). From the intersection of these traditions the paper develops a reading of national hegemonic cycles within a specific international competitive field. Sections 3 and 4 reconstruct the women's and men's cycles and propose a chronological visualisation supplemented by tables of medal records. Section 5 develops the thesis of complementary specialisation in an open arena as the explanatory mechanism of the cycles, articulated case by case. Section 6 addresses the contemporary phase and argues that we are facing structural multipolarity, not an interregnum. Section 7 concludes with considerations on the theoretical implications of the volleyball case for the sociology of sport and comparative economic sociology.

2. Theoretical framework: national configurations and global arena

The analysis proposed here draws on four convergent theoretical traditions. The first is the comparative literature on varieties of capitalism (Hall and Soskice 2001; Amable 2003, 2018) and on territorial and local capitalisms (Gough 2014; Trigilia 2025; Lane and Wood 2009). From these traditions we adopt two assumptions as our analytical starting point. The first is that national capitalist systems are not accidental variants of a single model, but coherent institutional configurations endowed with their own internal complementarities. The second is that organised sport, and professional volleyball in particular, constitutes an institutional sub-system of the national capitalism to which it belongs, reproducing its coordination logics: the Italy of the «three Italies» produces a district-based volleyball (clubs embedded in industrial districts, fragmented territorial sponsorship, youth sectors self-managed by clubs); the Japan of the Coordinated Market Economy and lifetime employment produces clubs that are sports divisions of large corporations; the United States of the Liberal Market Economy produces a collegiate-dual model based on the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association); post-Soviet Russia produces a state-corporate model centred on large state enterprises (Gazprom, Russian Railways); the Cuba of the planned economy produces an entirely state-run system managed by INDER (Instituto Nacional de Deportes, Educación Física y Recreación). National volleyball, in other words, is not a derivative and marginal domain with

respect to the economy: it is one of the sites in which national capitalism takes specific institutional form and exhibits its underlying complementarities. The configurations are not fungible: each has its own comparative advantages and its own structural limits, to which we return in Section 5.

The second tradition adopted by the paper is the sociology of historical-world hegemonies, developed from Wallerstein's world-systems theory (1984, 2004) and articulated by Arrighi (1994) into a theorisation of *hegemonic cycles* as an ordered sequence of dominant national configurations each characterised by phases of rise, consolidation, and decline. Arrighi shows that every hegemony does not emerge by chance, but corresponds to the specific encounter between a national configuration and a particular phase of development of the world capitalist system; when systemic conditions change, the hegemony declines and a new configuration, optimal in the new context, takes its place. From this tradition the paper borrows the vocabulary of hegemonic cycles and the structural intuition of their ordered succession; it adapts, however, the application, shifting the object from the world capitalist system to a specific international competitive field, the sporting field of volleyball, in which hegemonic dynamics operate on a shorter time scale (decadal rather than secular) but according to structurally analogous logics.

The third tradition is the sociology of fields developed by Pierre Bourdieu, who proposed an explicit application of the field-theoretic framework to sport (1978). The notion of field, understood as a structured space of positions in which collective agents compete for the specific capital of the field, and in which dominant positions can change over time through repositioning struggles and modifications of internal rules, provides the general analytical framework within which to inscribe the study of sporting hegemonic cycles. International volleyball constitutes, in Bourdieusian terms, a field endowed with its own relative autonomy, its own history of structuring, and its own criteria of consecration (Olympic Games, World Championships, World Cup as institutions that produce and legitimate the hierarchy of positions); competing national teams occupy positions in the field and struggle for the specific capital (the apex of the world hierarchy). The national configurations the paper describes are, in this reading, positioning strategies in the international field: strategies that succeed or fail according to their fit with the structure of the field at the historical moment considered.

The fourth tradition is the sociology of globalised sport. Maguire (1994; 1999) has proposed a reading of the global sporting process as a configuration moving simultaneously towards diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties: globalisation produces at once surface standardisation (regulations, formats, techniques) and underlying divergence (institutional configurations, organisational models, competitive identities). Subsequent work on athletic migration (Bale and Maguire 1994; Maguire and Falcous 2011) has articulated this insight by showing how global athlete flows follow precise,

asymmetric geographies, structured by differences between national systems. The historical spread of modern sporting models, as Guttmann (2000) has illustrated in detail for the 20th century, has followed asymmetrical trajectories in which different national capitalist systems have adopted, adapted and sometimes resisted global models, a process that has not led to homogenization, but rather to a differential articulation. Sport does not globalize by dissolving national differences; it globalises by interweaving a common international field with differentiated national systems (Houlihan 1997).

The intersection of these four traditions produces the analytical framework within which the paper operates. Varieties of capitalism provides the vocabulary of national configurations and internal complementarities; the sociology of historical-world hegemonies provides the model of ordered succession and the intuition that hegemonies are the product of the encounter between configuration and systemic phase; the sociology of fields provides the structural framework within which to inscribe international competition; the sociology of sport provides the specific empirical object and the vocabulary of sporting globalisation dynamics. None of these four traditions, taken singly, would be sufficient to sustain the reading proposed: their intertwining is the specific analytical contribution of this essay. The central thesis is that hegemonic cycles emerge from the historically specific encounter between a national configuration and a configuration of the global arena. When a national configuration meets arena conditions that reward it, a hegemony emerges. When the conditions of the arena change, the hegemony declines because of changes in the environment in which it operates. The Japanese system of the 1960s and 1970s did not abruptly deteriorate: the arena changed, rewarding different configurations. The Cuban system did not stop producing talent after 2000: the global arena of sporting labour changed, and the Cuban configuration became sub-optimal in the new context.

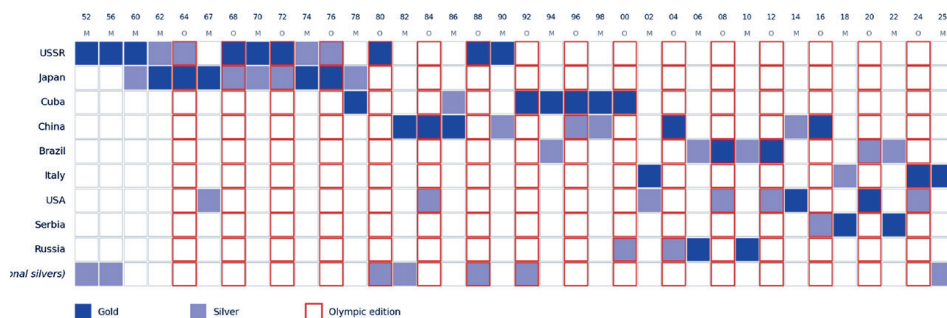
The conditions of the arena that may change, and that have historically changed, are at least five. First, the rules of the game: the introduction of the rally point system in 1999, the introduction of the libero role (1998), changes to the serve, rotation systems. Second, the structure of competitions: the addition of the Olympic Games in 1964, the introduction of the World Cup in 1965 (1973 for the women's tournament), the World League in 1990, the Grand Prix in 1993, and the Volleyball Nations League in 2018 have all changed the frequency, stakes, and calendar of competitions. Third, the international labour market: the post-Soviet opening, the explosion of the Italian market in the 1990s, and the subsequent expansion to the Turkish, Polish, Russian, and Chinese markets have transformed the mobility of athletes. Fourth, geopolitics: the Olympic boycotts of 1980 (Moscow) and 1984 (Los Angeles), the dissolution of the USSR, the Chinese opening, and the post-2022 sanctions on Russia have shaped the identity of the competitors in the arena. Fifth, the technical-athletic paradigm: the transition from the «net-bound»

volleyball of the 1950s and 1960s to the «athletic» volleyball of the 1980s, and then to the «scientific» volleyball of the 2000s, has changed the very criteria of what it means to play volleyball well.

3. Hegemonic cycles in women's volleyball

The medal records of the major women's competitions allow the cycles to be reconstructed with relative clarity. Figure 1 represents in chromatic form the podia - gold and silver - of the women's Olympic Games and World Championships from 1952 to 2025, ordering the nations according to their incidence in the principal hegemonic cycles.

Figure 1 - Podium positions (gold and silver) at the women's Olympic Games and World Championships, 1952-2025.



Source: authors'elaboration on FIVB and Olympics.com data

The chromatic representation by windows of time allows the articulation of the cycles to be read immediately. Soviet hegemony manifests itself as a continuous band spanning nearly four decades, from 1952 to 1990, with constant presence on the podium and few gaps: it is the longest competitive continuity in the history of international women's volleyball. The Japanese cycle, by contrast, appears as a compact and sharply delimited block between 1962 and 1976, with abrupt boundaries both at its opening and at its closing: the Japanese national team enters the summit abruptly, remains there for fifteen years, and withdraws just as rapidly without a transition phase.

The Cuban cycle produces an even denser visual concentration, extending from 1992 to 2000 and characterised by a prevalence of gold cells over silver: a chromatic datum that corresponds to the specificity of the Cuban case as a totalising hegemony. The Chinese pattern, by contrast, displays a bimodal structure, with two distinct cycles, 1981-1986 and 2014-2019, separated by a near-vacuum lasting three decades: an ana-

lytically significant feature, because it documents the possibility for a national system to produce successive cycles through partially renewed configurations.

After 2000 the heatmap registers a progressive fragmentation: no nation any longer produces continuous bands, and the mosaic distributed across Brazil, Italy, the United States, Serbia, China, and Russia visually renders the multipolarity of the contemporary phase. The Italian presence in the last two columns, Olympic gold in Paris 2024 and world gold in 2025, for the time being constitutes two consecutive cells of maximum intensity: too few to form a band in the historical sense, but consistent with the hypothesis of an emerging cycle, to which we return in Section 6.

Table 1 summarises the overall distribution of titles (Olympic golds, world golds, World Cup golds) by nation, indicating for each the period in which top-level competitive activity is concentrated. The breakdown confirms the succession of hegemonies already legible in Figure 1, and shows that no nation, taken individually, reaches in women's volleyball the concentration of titles that characterises, for example, the great traditions of international football: top-level production is historically distributed among several national systems in succession, not in compresence.

Table 1 - Distribution of major women's titles (Olympic Games, World Championships, World Cup) by nation and main period of hegemony.

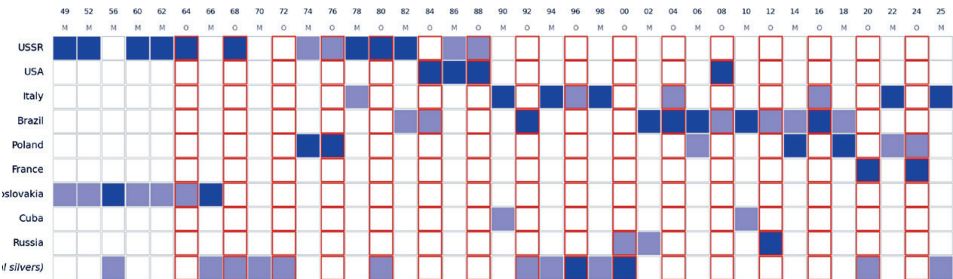
Nation	Oly. golds	Worlds	World Cup	Main period
USSR / Russia	5 (4+1)	7 (5+2)	1 (USSR)	1952–1990
Japan	2	3	1	1962–1976
Cuba	3	3	4	1978–2000
China	3	2	5	1981–86; 2014–19
Brazil	2	—	—	2008–2012
Italy	1	2	2	2002; 2024– present
United States	1	1	—	2014; 2020
Serbia	—	2	—	2018; 2022

Source: authors'elaboration on FIVB and Olympics.com data

4. Hegemonic cycles in men’s volleyball

The men’s pattern displays different articulations from the women’s. The Soviet band covers the entire period from 1949 to the early 1980s, but is not chromatically as compact as its women’s counterpart: the recurring alternation between gold and silver cells documents a greater articulation of the competition. Czechoslovakia, Poland, and East Germany constitute stable presences that fragment the hegemony, and that the heatmap renders immediately perceivable through the incidence of silver cells within the Soviet period. The United States cycle appears as a brief and concentrated block between 1984 and 1988, with sharp boundaries analogous to the women’s Japanese case: a window hegemony, produced by a configuration anomalous with respect to the national system to which it belongs. The Italian cycle displays a characteristic and analytically relevant visual structure: a first phase between 1990 and 1998 with three gold cells at the World Championships and a silver at the 1996 Olympics, a gap of roughly twenty years in the major trophies, and a re-emergence with the 2022 and 2025 World Championships. The most significant chromatic feature is the prevalence of silver cells at the Olympics even during the first cycle: the heatmap visualises the «Olympic paradox» discussed in Section 5.5, showing that Italy at the Olympics is regularly in the final but rarely wins.

Figure 2 - Podium positions (gold and silver) at the men’s Olympic Games and World Championships, 1949-2025.



Source: authors'elaboration on FIVB and Olympics.com data

The Brazilian cycle produces the most extensive band of post-Soviet men’s volleyball, with outer boundaries between 1992 and 2018 and a density peak between 2002 and 2016. Poland and France populate the contemporary phase with recurrent presences that do not, however, form continuous bands, and the fragmentation of the right-hand side of the heatmap reproduces, for the men’s game too, the physiognomy of structural multipolarity.

Table 2 reports the overall distribution of major men’s titles. Here too a pattern of historical succession rather than compresence is confirmed: top-level nations alternate in cycles, and no national system concentrates a dominant share of titles over the long period.

Table 2 - Distribution of major men's titles (Olympic Games, World Championships, World Cup) by nation and main period of hegemony.

Nation	Oly. golds	Worlds	World Cup	Main period
USSR / Russia	4 (3+1)	7 (6+1)	6 (4+2)	1949–1982; 2011–12
Italy	—	5	1	1990–1998; 2022–25
Brazil	3	3	3	1992; 2002– 2016
USA	3	2	2	1984–88; 2008; 2015
Poland	1	3	—	1974–76; 2014–18
Czechoslovakia	—	2	—	1956–1966
France	2	—	—	2020–2024
Japan	1	—	—	1972
Netherlands	1	—	—	1996
Yugoslavia	1	—	—	2000
East Germany	—	1	—	1970

Source: authors'elaboration on FIVB and Olympics.com data

The juxtaposition of the two heatmaps allows for a comparative observation. The hegemonic bands are morphologically distinguishable into two types. The hegemonies of the first group, women’s Soviet, Japanese, Cuban, produce bands with chromatically sharp contours, in which the prevalence of gold cells is high and silvers remain marginal. The hegemonies of the second group, men’s Italian and Brazilian, produce, by contrast, blurred bands, in which silver cells precede, accompany, and follow the periods of gold prevalence: they correspond to hegemonies consolidated in a polycentric arena, in which the nation dominates the level of finalists more than that of winners.

The chromatic distinction visualised by the heatmaps illustrates in immediate form one of the central points of our thesis: in phases of mature globalisation, hegemonies

change in nature before changing in existence, moving from compact to distributed forms.

5. The sociological explanation: optimal configurations in a shifting arena

The previous sections have reconstructed the hegemonic cycles and shown their decreasing concentration over time. What remains is to articulate the mechanism that, cycle after cycle, translates the configuration of a national system into a competitive advantage or disadvantage. We propose a three-level analytical scheme that we will apply to the six most relevant cases.

The first level is that of internal complementarities. Each national configuration is a set of components: the model of funding, the relationship between federation and clubs, the system of talent development, territorial embeddedness, position in global flows. These do not operate in isolation, but reinforce one another. The concept of institutional complementarity (Hall and Soskice 2001; Amable 2003) posits that the presence of one element increases the returns of the others: a youth sector embedded in clubs makes territorial embeddedness more productive, and vice versa. Each national configuration has its own architecture of complementarities, which makes it coherent as a system. This coherence is not an accidental given: it is the historical product of long co-evolutionary processes among the components.

The second level is that of specific advantages in a specific arena. Internal complementarities, in themselves, do not produce competitive advantage: they produce it only in contact with an environment that rewards those complementarities. Each configuration generates capacities that, under certain historical arena conditions, are decisive; under others, they are indifferent or counterproductive. The analysis of comparative advantage is therefore always twofold: an internal causal chain (how complementarities produce certain capacities) and a matching chain (why those capacities matter in that specific international arena).

The third level is that of the specialisation trap. When the arena changes, national configurations do not easily adapt, because modifying one component would require modifying the others with which it is complementary. The more coherent a configuration is, the more difficult it is to modify; the more difficult it is to modify, the more exposed it becomes when the environment changes. The volleyball case illustrates this dynamic with particular clarity, because the time windows are short (15-20 years for a hegemonic cycle) and arena changes are sharply identifiable. We add a theoretically important point: in the specialisation trap, certain elements of the system do not simply stop producing advantage, they turn into active costs.

We now apply this three-level scheme to the six most analytically significant cycles of the past seventy years of international volleyball. The selection requires an explicit methodological note. Sections 3 and 4 reconstructed the medal records by separating men's and women's competitions and identifying, overall, about ten cycles and relevant phases across both genders. The discussion that follows, however, is not organised by gender: it selects six cycles chosen on the basis of their diagnostic relevance to our thesis, their historical intensity, and the diversity of the national configurations they represent. The Japanese case (Section 5.1) is a women's hegemony; the Soviet case (5.2) is primarily a men's hegemony but with relevant women's manifestations; the Cuban case (5.3) is women's; the American case (5.4) is men's; the Italian case (5.5) is men's; the Brazilian case (5.6) covers both genders. The decision to select by cycle rather than by gender is theoretically motivated: the three-level mechanism - internal complementarities, advantages in a specific arena, specialization trap - operates in the same way across both genders, because it acts at the level of the national system and not at the level of the gendered organisation of volleyball. For each case we identify (a) the internal complementarities of the configuration, (b) the causal chain that produced advantage under the arena conditions of the moment, and (c) the change in the arena that deactivated the advantage and triggered the specific cost of the configuration. The aim is not to exhaust the history of each cycle, but to show that the same mechanism operates in all of them, through specific causal chains and different empirical contents.

5.1 The Japanese women's hegemony (1962-1976)

The Japanese configuration of the first cycle is corporate-paternalist. The term denotes an arrangement in which sport is organised as a function of large corporations: clubs are corporate articulations that hire athletes as employees, finance their activity as part of the corporate budget, and oversee their technical and disciplinary training according to the long-term logics proper to stable employment within the firm: the lifetime employment of the postwar Japanese model (Dore 1973). Internal complementarities are dense and mutually reinforcing: the clubs of the V.League (the professional league organised by the Japan Volleyball League Organization) are sports divisions of large corporations; athletes are corporate employees; the lifetime employment regime produces teams that remain stable for years; the national team is in fact the Nichibo Kaizuka squad, belonging to the large textile firm Nichibo and coached by Hirofumi Daimatsu in a regime of intensive collective training (Okajima 2021). Corporate stability produces team stability, which enables the development of elaborate tactical schemes, which in turn produce victories that legitimate the corporate investment.

The causal chain that produced advantage operated through two mechanisms. First, complex tactical coordination: international volleyball at the time was still an amateur sport, with teams gathering for only a few annual competitions; a team that trained together throughout the year for years on end could develop tactical schemes that competitors were unable to replicate in a few weeks of training camp (Yasutaka Matsudaira's «time-difference attack»¹, the elaborate rotations, the defensive synchronisation). Second, collective discipline: in the absence of a systematically applied sport science, the advantage was played out in the quantity and quality of collective work, and here Japanese corporate culture constituted a structural asset. The arena conditions that rewarded these capacities were: low frequency of international competitions, absence of a labour market, limited individual specialisation, and the impossibility for competing nations to enjoy training opportunities as intensive and continuous as those needed to develop tactical solidity.

The arena change that deactivated the advantage was threefold and unfolded between the mid-1970s and the early 1980s. First, the introduction of tactical innovations rewarding individual specialisation: the systematic tactical use of the back-row attack (Lv and Kong, 2025), a rule formally available since the 1920s but applied as a structured offensive system for the first time by Poland under Hubert Wagner at the 1976 Montreal Olympics, as a hybridization of Yasutaka Matsudaira's earlier quick-attack scheme, and the role specialisations that consolidated in the 1980s required players trained individually, not only teams trained collectively. Second, the emergence of sport science as a structured competitive advantage: the USSR and Eastern Bloc countries systematically applied physiology, biomechanics, and statistics, while the Japanese model remained grounded in traditional discipline. Third, the increase in international competitions, which rewarded the capacity to renew the roster rapidly.

The same complementarities that produced advantage turned into active costs in the new arena. Lifetime employment, which had ensured continuity, now produced rigidity:

¹ The time-difference attack is a system of synchronized attacks in which two or more spikers of the same team execute the approach simultaneously or in very rapid sequence but strike the ball at different moments: one «on time», that is, immediately after the ball leaves the setter's hand, the other or others «off time», that is, with a slight calibrated delay (Xu 2020). The effect is to displace the opposing block: the block is forced to jump in function of the first attacker who jumps, and when the second attacker strikes the ball a fraction of a second later, the block is already on its descending phase. The time-difference attack requires three conditions that are worth highlighting in order to understand why it worked specifically in the Japanese system and not elsewhere: a team continuity sufficient to allow spikers to synchronize to fractions of a second (which requires months if not years of joint training), a setter of the utmost precision capable of delivering balls at different heights and timings, and an executorial discipline preventing the second attacker from instinctively anticipating the jump. In the Japanese system of the period all three conditions were maximized by the corporate-paternalist configuration.

clubs could not acquire foreign specialists, Japanese players did not emigrate, rosters aged together. The culture of collective discipline, which had produced synchronisation, now hindered individual innovation. Japan did not become worse: the arena changed in ways that transformed its configuration from an asset into a constraint. This is the first manifestation of the specialization trap.

5.2 The Soviet men's and women's hegemony (1949-1990)

The Soviet configuration is the classical state-planned one. Internal complementarities are articulated around a central axis: the State as sole planner, operating through the Sports Committee and a network of specialised sports schools (DJuSS). Early identification of talent occurred on a national scale; training applied scientific methodologies developed by the institutes of physical culture; athletes were salaried by the State; club teams (CSKA Moscow, Dinamo, Lokomotiv) were expressions of state apparatuses. Centralisation produced large-scale talent identification systems, the schools produced athletes of high technical level, and winning teams legitimated the system in political terms on the institutional architecture of Soviet sport (Riordan 1977; 1991).

The causal chain operated through two asymmetries. First, asymmetry of scale: in an arena where Western competitors produced talent through decentralised local clubs and amateur school tournaments, the USSR produced talent through systematic observation of the infant and adolescent population on a continental scale; even assuming an identical distribution of potential athletic talent, the Soviet system intercepted a much higher fraction of it. Second, methodological asymmetry: from the 1950s onward, Soviet institutes were developing theories of training that Western competitors would absorb only decades later. The arena conditions were: volleyball as an amateur sport in Western countries, professionalism prohibited by Olympic rules until the 1980s, and an international labour market that did not yet exist.

The arena change is composed of three convergent dynamics operating between the late 1980s and the 1990s. First, the diffusion of sport science beyond the socialist bloc: Soviet methods were studied and reworked in the Italian, Brazilian, American, and Chinese systems; the methodological asymmetry vanished. Second, the opening of Western professional markets: talents trained in Soviet schools began to look westward. Third, and decisively, the political dissolution of the system-country: the USSR dissolved in 1991, and with it dissolved the material conditions that allowed the configuration to operate.

Centralisation, which had been the motor of large-scale talent identification, became a political vulnerability: when the State apparatus no longer worked, the entire sporting system simultaneously lost funding, coordination, and ideological cohesion;

there was no decentralised network of clubs capable of surviving autonomously. The same configuration that had produced the World Championship victories of 1949, 1952, 1960, 1962, 1978, and 1982 produces, twenty years later, a Russia that does return to occasional victories (Olympic gold 2012, Women's World Championships 2006 and 2010) but with an already different configuration, the state-corporate one centred on Gazprom, Russian Railways, and security apparatuses.

5.3 The Cuban women's hegemony (1990-2000)

The Cuban configuration is state-socialist, based on the comprehensive planning of the sport system by INDER, established in 1961. Internal complementarities are an extension of the Soviet model applied to a peripheral context: INDER as the sole governing body, the provincial EIDE for early identification, the ESPA for specialisation, and the national centre of Cerro Pelado for Olympic preparation (Pettavino and Pye 1994). The Cuban specificity is totalisation: in a country of eleven million inhabitants, the system observes the entire child population and selects candidates according to refined anthropometric criteria (Carvajal et al. 2015). Women's volleyball was particularly favoured by the encounter between the selection system and the anthropometric distribution of the Cuban population.

The causal chain operated through two mechanisms. First, anthropometric asymmetry: the Cuban system produced, on a national scale, female athletes whose physique, explosiveness, and power anticipated by a decade the anthropometric evolution of the international game. Mireya Luis, Regla Torres, and Magaly Carvajal were athletic phenomena that European women's volleyball, still built around athletes of lower average height, struggled to contain (Ramos, Echemendia and Ramirez Valdès 2020). Second, systemic-consolidation asymmetry: the USSR had dissolved in 1991, the China of the first cycle was already in a phase of generational turnover, Brazil had not yet consolidated its configuration, and Italian women's volleyball was at technically inferior levels; no great competing system was operating fully in the first half of the 1990s. The arena conditions were: a systemic vacuum among the major women's national teams post-1991, a women's professional labour market still in embryonic form, and Cuban internal restrictions on athlete mobility.

The arena change came with the maturation of the global women's labour market after 2000. The Italian Serie A1 grew rapidly, the Turkish league became the richest in the world, and the Chinese league professionalised; the wages now accessible to athletes became disproportionate compared to Cuban state salaries. At the same time, the economic crisis of the *Periodo especial* made internal conditions increasingly difficult. The combination opened a space of defection that administrative restrictions could no

longer close: at first isolated defections, then a structured exodus, and finally the 2013 reform that sought to regularize the phenomenon (Carter 2014).

The transformation of complementarities into costs is here dramatic. The Cuban system continues to produce talent but is structurally unable to retain it. State totalisation is now the problem: since the State is the only possible employer and cannot compete with global market wages, trained athletes abandon the system. The planning that produced athletes cannot produce retention mechanisms. This is the specialisation trap in its purest form: to modify its configuration the Cuban system would have to renounce totalisation, thereby losing its original productive capacity.

5.4 The United States men's hegemony (1984-1988)

The American case is theoretically illuminating precisely because it is not the product of the historical American configuration, but of a centralised programme implemented against the grain. The structural American configuration is well known: the NCAA as the engine of talent (Peach 2007), men's indoor professionalism essentially absent, sport secondary to football, basketball, and baseball. In the 1970s and 1980s, the United States national team, frustrated by poor Olympic finishes, decided to gather the best players exiting the collegiate system and bring them together in a federal residential programme at Colorado Springs, directed by Doug Beal. This was a conscious imitation of the Soviet-Cuban model: centralisation, communal life, intensive tactical coordination. The program operated from 1981-82 and was designed for the 1984 Olympic window scheduled to take place at home.

The causal chain operated through a single but decisive mechanism: the temporary concentration, within a decentralised arena, of a team enjoying all the advantages of planning. American talent existed but was dispersed across the colleges, without national coordination. Beal concentrated it. The arena conditions included a decisive geopolitical factor: the Soviet boycott of Los Angeles 1984. The USSR, the main competitor, did not participate. The United States won the gold. The 1988 case is even more interesting: in Seoul the USSR was present, and the United States won anyway (3-1 in the final).

The arena change here was not an epochal shift, but the exhaustion of the programme itself. The centralised model was not a structural configuration of the American system: it was a resource-intensive experiment incompatible with a sporting economy centred on other sports and with an NCAA that was returning to its role as the engine of talent. When the KiraIy generation aged, the programme was not replaced by an equivalent configuration: the United States returned to its collegiate-dual configuration, lost men's competitiveness for ten years, and would re-emerge only in 2008 (Olympic gold) and 2015 (World Cup), with configurations that were always episodic. The case

illustrates an important theoretical implication: a configuration anomalous with respect to the system-country may win in a specific arena, but cannot consolidate if it does not correspond to the structural complementarities of the system-country. It is, in negative form, a confirmation of the thesis: consolidated hegemonies require a correspondence between configuration and national capitalism; anomalous configurations may produce victories within windows, not long-period hegemonies.

5.5 The Italian men's hegemony (1990-1998)

The Italian configuration is the district-based one, specific to the Italian system-country and structurally linked to the industrial districts studied by Crouch (2004). Internal complementarities are articulated around the embeddedness of clubs in industrial districts: sponsors are local firms, fragmented, large in number (a top-level club can reach over a hundred sponsors); funding is sustained by the density of the district; youth sectors of the clubs capture early identification; the federation (FIPAV – Federazione Italiana Pallavolo) operates with a limited regulatory role; the SuperLega is in fact self-governed by the participating clubs. The national team is the product of a championship which, between 1990 and 2000, became the technically highest in the world, attracting the best foreign players.

Over the district nucleus operates a second federal-level tier that introduces planning elements in much lighter form than in the Soviet-Cuban systems: the youth territorial selections managed by the Provincial and Regional FIPAV Committees (Trofeo dei Territori, Trofeo delle Regioni); the system of Regional and Territorial Qualification Centres; and the Club Italia, founded in 1998 as a federal team gathering the best young Italian players in a development path managed directly by FIPAV. Sociologically, this second level compensates for the geographical limits of the district-based configuration, capturing talent in areas the top-level clubs do not reach. The Italian configuration, while remaining of a district-based matrix, takes the form of a hybrid configuration in its mature arrangement.

The causal chain operated through a specific mechanism: daily exposure. In the 1990s the Italian players of Velasco's national team (Zorzi, Giani, Bernardi, Gardini, Cantagalli) played in SuperLega clubs against the best foreign players every week, for ten months a year. The frequency, the intensity, and the variety of these confrontations produced a level of competitive experience incomparable to that of their competitors, who played in less dense national championships and gathered as national teams only for occasional appointments.

This is where the Olympic paradox comes into play: the same configuration that produced victories in the World Championships and in the World League produced a specific disadvantage at the Olympic Games. In order to play a championship of the highest level (twenty to twenty-six weeks of SuperLega plus the Champions League)

Italian players arrived at the summer appointments carrying an accumulated athletic and mental load that teams from countries with less dense leagues did not bear. For the Olympics, concentrated within two weeks in August in single-elimination knockout format, this problem became decisive. The 1996 Dutch squad (gold), the 2000 Yugoslav squad (gold), and the 2004 Brazilian squad (gold against Italy in the final) had less intensive national calendars, longer rest periods, and a peak of form calibrated to the event.

The density of the championship, the great asset of the Italian system, was a structural property. To be less dense, the SuperLega would have had to be less wealthy; to be less wealthy, it would have needed fewer sponsors; to have fewer sponsors, it would have needed to be less embedded in the districts. The specialisation trap operated here simultaneously with the genesis of the advantage: Italy could not at once have a top-level championship and a national team that wins the Olympics. The history of Italian men's volleyball between 1990 and 2008 - four lost Olympic finals, never a gold - is not the product of misfortune or psychological fragility: it is the structural price of its national configuration.

The arena change that attenuated Italian hegemony at the World Championships after 1998 was the maturation of other national leagues (Russian, Polish, Brazilian, and later Turkish), which eroded the singularity of the Italian level. The Italian configuration remained in place but the comparative advantage it produced was reduced. Consistent with this reading is the fact that the Italian men's team has returned to winning World Championships in 2022 and 2025: the system is once again competitive. But it does not yet win Olympic gold, and the structural explanation remains valid.

5.6 The Brazilian men's and women's hegemony (2002-2016)

In the Brazilian configuration, internal complementarities are articulated around a central actor, the Confederação Brasileira de Voleibol (CBV), which operates as a strategic planner: it coordinates youth sectors, organises the national leagues, manages the national teams, integrates the indoor system with the beach system in a dual specialisation, and maintains strategic relationships with multinational sponsors. The configuration also integrates two dimensions that other configurations lack: a broad and socially differentiated demographic base, and state social programmes that use sport as an instrument of inclusion and social mobility (Netto 2011).

The causal chain is particularly articulated, and explains why the Brazilian cycle is the longest post-Soviet one (fifteen years) and why it worked across both genders. First, demographic scale and specialisation: Brazil could afford to train a large number of athletes without concentrating resources, unlike Cuba (obliged to concentrate) and unlike Russia (with a sporting catchment not equally specialised). Second, the dual indoor-beach specialisation, in which the two systems reinforce each other. Third, continuous technical

leadership: Bernardo Rezende led the men's national team from 2001 to 2017, and José Roberto Guimarães the women's team from 2003 to 2012, long periods of stability that allowed the consolidation of refined methodologies. The arena conditions were specific to a historical phase: a global labour market already open but not yet saturated, a dense but not yet chaotic calendar, sport science consolidated but not yet uniformly distributed.

The Brazilian cycle manifested itself across two twelve-year windows (2001-12 and 2005-16). Brazil was not hegemonic in the totalising sense of the USSR or Cuba, but was consistently in the final or the semi-final for fifteen years. It was the first true hegemony in a polycentric arena, anticipating the volleyball to come.

The arena change is qualitatively different from the previous cases: it is not a geopolitical rupture or a change in regulation, but a progressive levelling. Maguire (1994) would call this dynamic «diminishing contrasts»: the minor countries approach the major ones technically, scientifically, and methodologically. Poland, France, Italy, USA, Slovenia, and Bulgaria progressively emerge. The Brazilian advantage did not disappear through internal deterioration: it disappeared because the differential produced by the Brazilian system has been reduced relative to a generally higher international level.

The transformation of complementarities into costs is here less dramatic than in the Cuban and Soviet cases, but nonetheless visible. Continuous technical leadership becomes potential rigidity: when Rezende left in 2017, the system struggled to renew itself. The dual indoor-beach specialisation becomes potential dispersal of resources at a time when beach volleyball is professionalising autonomously. Above all, the export capacity, which had been an asset so long as exported talent returned for national-team duty, becomes a complication when Brazilian players based in Italy, Poland, and Turkey play national calendars that overlap with those of the national team. Brazil is slowly becoming a system suffering from the same Italian Olympic paradox: it still wins World Championships, but with growing difficulties at the Olympic finals.

5.7 Synthesis: a single mechanism, different manifestations

The systematic application of the three-level scheme to the six cases allows us to see that they are different manifestations of a single mechanism. The same logic operates in all of them: dense internal complementarities, specific advantages in a specific arena, transformation of those advantages into costs when the arena changes. What varies is not the structure of the mechanism, but its empirical content: which complementarities, in which arena, against which change.

We can reformulate the difference among the six cases along two axes. The first is the dimension of the arena change that deactivated the advantage. For Japan 1962-76 the decisive dimension was the technical-tactical paradigm: the introduction of individual specialisation

and of sport science. For the USSR 1949-90 it was the combination of the opening of the labour market and the geopolitical dissolution of the system-country. For Cuba 1990-2000 it was the maturation of the global women's labour market after 2000. For the United States 1984-88 it was not properly an arena change, but the exhaustion of the internal resources devoted to an anomalous configuration. For Italy 1990-98 it was the maturation of comparable national championships, which attenuated the uniqueness of the Italian system. For Brazil 2002-16 it was the overall levelling of the international technical level.

The second axis is the form of the specialisation trap. For Japan the trap is organisational rigidity: lifetime employment, which produced continuity, prevents individual innovation. For the USSR the trap is political dependence: the sport system does not survive the dissolution of the state apparatus that sustained it. For Cuba the trap is incapacity for retention: state totalisation makes it impossible to compete with global market salaries. For the United States the trap is systemic incompatibility: the anomalous configuration does not correspond to the complementarities of American capitalism and cannot consolidate. For Italy the trap is the Olympic paradox: the same density of the championship that produces advantage at the World Championships produces disadvantage at the Olympic Games. For Brazil the trap is progressive levelling: the system continues to function but the comparative differential shrinks as competitors acquire the same capacities.

The scheme thus elaborated allows us to avoid two less solid alternative readings. The first is the individualist reading, which attributes hegemonies to specific coaches or specific generations of talent; the scheme shows that Daimatsu, George, Beal, Velasco, Rezende all operated within configurations that made them possible and valorised them, and that without those configurations their own capacities would not produce comparable results. The second is the purely structural reading, which attributes hegemonies to immutable national configurations. The scheme shows that configurations win only in specific arenas, and that arena changes turn the same characteristics from assets into constraints. The sociology of hegemonic cycles requires holding together the two levels - configuration and arena - articulated through the causal chains operating between them.

6. The contemporary phase: interregnum or structural multipolarity?

The question that opens the contemporary phase is whether the present is a transitional interregnum between an exhausted hegemony (Brazil, particularly in the men's game) and a new hegemony in formation, or whether we have entered a structurally multipolar configuration. The thesis we advance is that this is a case of *structural multipolarity*, and that this multipolarity is itself a product of the current conditions of the global arena.

Three current arena conditions sustain this reading. The first is the definitive maturation of the global labour market after 2010: the Italian, Polish, Turkish, Russian, Japanese, Brazilian markets, and in recent years the Chinese and Emirati ones, have reached sizes and remuneration levels such that international talent is now redistributed in capillary fashion among different countries. No single league any longer concentrates a dominant share of the world's best players. The Italian SuperLega, which in the 1990s was the «world championship league», is today one of the three or four top leagues, no longer hegemonic. This redistribution produces a levelling of technical and tactical competence among many countries, because the players of the major national teams meet and confront each other in clubs all over the world.

The second condition is the complete diffusion of scientific preparation systems. In the 1970s only the USSR and Japan applied sport science systematically; today Italy, Poland, France, Brazil, the USA, Japan, China, Iran, Argentina, the Netherlands, Germany, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic operate with comparable scientific-technical structures. The comparative advantage that derived from science has disappeared. Maguire (1994; 1999) conceptualised this as surface technical convergence: it is particularly visible today.

The third condition is the post-2022 geopolitical reconfiguration. The exclusion of Russia from international competitions removed one of the historically most competitive systems. But this removal, rather than opening space for a new hegemony, intensified multipolarity: the Russian vacuum was filled by many competitors.

The contemporary women's phase is partly different. Here the irruption of Velasco's Italy, with four major trophies in fifteen months, resembles a return of a classic hegemonic cycle. Yet two elements complicate the reading. First: the 2025 World Championship final ended in a tie-break (15-8) against Turkey (Olympics.com 2025). A victory dependent on narrow margins is not a consolidated hegemony. Second: the field of contemporary women's competitors is broader than in any previous cycle. Italy, Turkey, Brazil, the USA, China, Japan, Poland, Serbia, the Netherlands, and Germany are all globally competitive. The new Italian hegemony, if it consolidates, will be a hegemony in a strongly multipolar arena, structurally different from the Cuban or Soviet hegemony of the past.

The conclusion is that contemporary multipolarity is not an interregnum destined to close, but a feature of the current conditions of the arena. The mature globalisation of volleyball has produced a situation in which the winning configuration is no longer *one* configuration superior to all others, but a plurality of comparable configurations, each endowed with specific comparative advantages. Italy of the districts wins through its attractive capacity; the Poland of the national-popular configuration through its concentration of state-corporate resources; France through the export of its own tal-

ent thoroughly developed abroad (the French national team is largely a selection of players who play in the Italian, Polish, and Russian leagues); Brazil through its developmentalist catchment; women's Turkey through its aggressive import market. Each of these configurations may win a specific trophy in a specific conjuncture, but none can impose a long-period hegemony. This is the confirmation, in sporting form, of the broader sociological thesis that after a phase of supposed global homogenisation we are witnessing the re-emergence of stable institutional divergences (Hassel and Palier 2021): the difference is that, to produce hegemony, a single configuration was sufficient; to produce stable multipolarity, many configurations in competition are required.

7. Conclusions

This paper has argued that the hegemonic cycles of international volleyball over the past seventy years are best understood as a succession of national configurations that prove optimal in relation to the historically specific conditions of the global arena. Hegemonies are not the products of fortunate generations or great coaches; they are products of national institutional systems in the moments when those systems find themselves operating in arenas that reward their internal complementarities. When the arena changes, the hegemony declines, even if the national configuration remains intact.

The three-level analytical scheme proposed in Section 5, internal complementarities, specific advantages in a specific arena, specialisation trap, is the principal argumentative contribution of the paper. The first level recovers the original insight of Varieties of Capitalism about the internal coherence of national systems. The second level articulates the matching between configuration and environment, showing that comparative advantage is not a property of configurations in themselves but of their encounter with specific arena conditions. The third level - the specialisation trap, in which the same complementarities that produced advantage turn into active costs when the arena changes - is what the original theory had underestimated and which the volleyball case, with its short time windows and sharply identifiable arena changes, illustrates with particular clarity. The model remains in line with the Variety of Capitalisms framework but corrects its excess of stasis: national systems are coherent, but precisely their coherence makes them vulnerable to environmental change in ways that synchronic analysis struggles to see.

Three theoretical implications are worth signalling in conclusion. The first concerns the sociology of sport: the analysis suggests that the succession of international sporting hegemonies is interpretable neither through purely individualist models (talent, leadership) nor through purely deterministic models (immutable national systems). A

historical-structural perspective is needed, one that holds together configurations and arenas, complementarities and timing.

The second concerns comparative economic sociology. The volleyball case shows that the mechanisms of institutional comparative advantage theorised by Varieties of Capitalism function dynamically, not only statically: a national configuration may be optimal in one era and sub-optimal in another without having been modified. This is an important addition to the original theory of Hall and Soskice (2001), which tended to thematise comparative advantages as substantially stable properties of systems.

The third concerns the debate on globalisation. Volleyball of the past seventy years displays a three-phase trajectory: a pre-global phase (1949-1980 ca.) in which the most scientifically equipped and best-planned systems dominated (USSR, Japan); a phase of progressive globalization (1980-2010 ca.) in which new hegemonies emerged, enabled by the opening of markets and international competition (USA, Italy, Cuba, Brazil); a phase of mature globalisation (post-2010) in which the full redistribution of talent and technical convergence produce structural multipolarity. Hegemony, in this sense, is a phenomenon of «transition», typical of phases of incomplete globalisation. When globalisation is completed, when national configurations are many and all sufficiently competitive, the hegemony of a single configuration ceases to be possible, and multipolarity becomes the permanent condition. If this reading is correct, what we observe in the contemporary men's game is not the wait for a new hegemony, but the first appearance of a fully globalised arena. The women's game, though with Italy in a leading position, seems to be moving in the same direction, with growing competitive levelling among the world's top eight to ten national teams.

A note of caution in closing. The thesis of structural multipolarity is interpretive: it cannot be excluded that, in the coming years, a specific national configuration may produce a new hegemonic cycle. Italian women's volleyball, should it consolidate the 2024-2025 results, could be the first such case. But even a hypothetical Italian hegemony would be a hegemony in a multipolar arena, won on narrow margins, qualitatively different from the total hegemonies of Japan in the 1970s or Cuba in the 1990s. The point is not whether hegemonies will return, but what type of hegemony will still be possible. The reading proposed in this paper is that the totalising hegemonies of the past are structurally exhausted, and that the contemporary phase marks the passage to a qualitatively different competitive regime, in which even the most important victories coexist with the persistence of many comparable competitors.

[Submitted 11 February 2026 – Accepted 14 May 2026]

References

- Amable, B.
2003 *The Diversity of Modern Capitalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Amable, B.
2018 'Diversity and the dynamics of capitalism', *European Journal of Economics and Economic Policies*, 15(2), pp. 238-248.
- Arrighi, G.
1994 *The Long Twentieth Century. Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times*, London, Verso.
- Bagnasco, A.
1977 *Tre Italie. La problematica territoriale dello sviluppo italiano*, Bologna, il Mulino.
- Bale, J. and J. Maguire (eds.)
1994 *The Global Sports Arena. Athletic Talent Migration in an Interdependent World*, London, Frank Cass.
- Bourdieu, P.
1978 'Sport and social class', *Social Science Information*, 17(6), pp. 819-840.
1988 'Program for a sociology of sport', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 5, pp. 153-161.
1993 *The Field of Cultural Production*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Carter, T.F.
2014 'Game changer: the role of sport in revolution', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 31(7), pp. 735-746.
- Carvajal, W., S. León, M.E. González, I. Echevarría and M. Martinez
2015 'Morphological changes of elite Cuban female volleyball players, 1984-2008', *Revista Española de Antropología Física*, 36, pp. 33-44.
- Crouch, C.
2004 'Hybrid governance and networked firms', in *Changing Governance of Local Economies: Responses of European Local Production Systems*, pp. 119-127.
- Dore, R.
1973 *British Factory-Japanese Factory. The Origins of National Diversity in Industrial Relations*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- FIVB
2025a *Italy and Bulgaria Clash in 2025 World Championship Final Match*, URL: fivb.com.
2025b '2025 in review. Great season for Italian women's volleyball crowned with the World Title', 31 December, URL: fivb.com/2025-in-review-great-season-for-italian-womens-volleyball-crowned-with-the-world-title/.
- Giulianotti, R. and R. Robertson
2013 'Sport and globalization', in D.L. Andrews and B. Carrington (eds.), *A Companion to Sport*, Oxford, Wiley Blackwell, pp. 41-60.
- Gough, J.

- 2014 'The difference between local and national capitalism, and why local capitalisms differ from one another: a Marxist approach', *Capital & Class*, 38(1), pp. 197-210.
- Guttmann, A.
2000 'The development of modern sports', in *Handbook of Sports Studies*, pp. 248-259.
- Hall, P.A. and D. Soskice (eds.)
2001 *Varieties of Capitalism. The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Hassel, A. and B. Palier (eds.)
2021 *Growth and Welfare in Advanced Capitalist Economies. How Have Growth Regimes Evolved?*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Houlihan, B.
1997 'Sport, national identity and public policy', *Nations and Nationalism*, 3(1), pp. 113-137.
- Lane, C. and G. Wood
2009 'Capitalist diversity and diversity within capitalism', *Economy and Society*, 38(4), pp. 531-551.
- Lv, K. and C. Kong
2025 'Analysis of tactical variations in position 3 offense in volleyball matches', *Cambridge Sport Science*, 2025(2), pp. 9-16.
- Maguire, J.
1994 'Sport, identity politics, and globalization. Diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 11(4), pp. 398-427.
1999 *Global Sport. Identities, Societies, Civilizations*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Maguire, J. and M. Falcous (eds.)
2011 *Sport and Migration. Borders, Boundaries and Crossings*, London, Routledge.
- Netto, J.A.
2011 'A evolução do voleibol brasileiro: um estudo de caso na perspectiva da hélice tríplice', *Revista Intercontinental de Gestão Desportiva-Rigd*, 1(2), pp. 134-135.
- Okajima, H.
2021 'Les Sorcières de l'Orient/The Witches of the Orient/Tōyō no Majo', *Journal of Film Preservation*, (105), pp. 161-163.
- Olympics.com
2023 "'The Spectacular Caribbean Girls'. Cuba's Three Volleyball Golds in a Row', URL: olympics.com/en/news/the-spectacular-caribbean-girls-cubas-three-volleyball-golds-in-a-row.

Olympics.com

2025 *FIVB Women's Volleyball World Championship 2025. Olympic Champions Italy Clinch World Title*, URL: olympics.com/en/news/fivb-womens-volleyball-world-championship-2025-italy-clinch-title.

s.d. *History of FIVB Volleyball World Cup and Winners List*, URL: olympics.com/en/news/volleyball-world-cup-men-women-history-format-results-champions.

Peach, J.

2007 'College athletics, universities, and the NCAA', *The Social Science Journal*, 44(1), pp. 12-22.

Pettavino, P.J. and G. Pye

1994 *Sport in Cuba: The Diamond in the Rough*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press.

Ramos, J.P., J.S. Echemendía and A.D. Ramírez Valdés

2020 'Hazañas de las mujeres cubanas en el deporte', *Revista Caribeña de Ciencias Sociales*.

Riordan, J.

1977 *Sport in Soviet Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

1991 *Sport, Politics, and Communism*, Manchester, Manchester University Press.

Trigilia, C.

2025 'Models of capitalism and types of democracy', in *Handbook of Comparative Political Economy*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 503-516.

Wallerstein, I.

1984 *The Politics of the World-Economy: The States, the Movements and the Civilizations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

2004 *World-Systems Analysis. An Introduction*, Durham, Duke University Press.

Wikipedia

2026a *FIVB Men's Volleyball World Championship*, retrieved April 2026.

2026b *FIVB Women's Volleyball World Championship*, retrieved April 2026.

2026c *Volleyball at the Summer Olympics*, retrieved April 2026.

2026d *List of Olympic Medalists in Volleyball*, retrieved April 2026.

2026e *FIVB Volleyball Men's World Cup and FIVB Volleyball Women's World Cup*, retrieved April 2026.

Xu, Z.

2020 'Research on the innovation of volleyball technology and tactics', *International Core Journal of Engineering*, 6(3), pp. 267-271.