

“The 7 Herculean feats” or how to boost sports archives by playing

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On July 2, 2019, we hosted the first archiving Olympics in history at the Terrassa Historical Archives. Behind the grandiosity of this statement was a fun activity that we were able to offer to more than two hundred people, during the festive context of the Terrassa Fair. The purpose of this activity was to show the archives to a diverse group of attendees, including kids and families, and in the process, to explain the documentary fonds we have at our facility that relate to sports. The activity was designed, as we said, to be enjoyable and fun, and it also included an educational component highlighting the documentation on sports events held in the city of Terrassa. Ultimately, we hoped to inspire people to make a donation or to inform us of any fonds that are still being held by any sports organizations or individuals. A number of objectives came into play—quite literally—to once again explain the social function of the archives, make them more popular and to fill in the gaps where information is lacking. It turns out that the sports fonds, where we can find information on sporting activities in the city of Terrassa, make up a very small fraction of the total archives that are available to the public. Terrassa, a city renowned for its textile industry during the 19th and 20th centuries, both in Spain and abroad, has numerous fonds related to this activity. However, in tracking down many of the heirs of these old industrialists, we're able to find links with the historical sports clubs. These include football, basketball, chess, ping pong, and most of all, hockey, the star sport in Terrassa, played by many of the industrial elite of the time. During the 20th century, it was precisely the sport of the hockey that made it possible to internationalize a concrete vision of the city of Terrassa, for having contributed many players from Terrassa to different Olympic Games. The tradition of sports in Terrassa is undeniable, but its representation in the documentary archives is not so apparent.

“The 7 Herculean Feats” was a leisure activity whose goal was to incorporate all of these aspects into one moment. On one hand, there were seven games set up that were played in teams of ten people. These games were designed in an Olympics format, where participants could get a look into the typical work that archivists do, in an entertaining way. As such, the teams had to complete an extreme dominoes game (using cardboard filers); a task called “The killer box”, which timed how long players took to put together an archive box; a staple launch for the longest distance; a tower of moving boxes, as high as they could; a quiz on digital conservation using the Kahoot! app, and finally, the most difficult task of all, the so-called “Disaster Archive”, in which participants had to organize and recycle various documents scattered on the ground, including paper, plastic, old videotape, and other pieces of debris. As you can see, activities that were more games than sports, but still a lot of fun for the untrained public.

But how were we able to incorporate raising awareness for preserving sports fonds into this whole show? Before the teams started the game, there was an information session in our multipurpose room, where the concept of the game was explained with a sample photograph from the sports fonds that we have at the archives. With an enjoyable presentation, we highlighted the fonds from sports photographer Joan Biarnés (father of the well-known photojournalist Joana Biarnés); the Club Sferic Terrassa photograph collection, primarily based on basketball and roller hockey, and documents from the Terrassa Chess Club, among others. During this presentation we also explained the “Fem arxiu, fem esports” [Let's do archives, let's do sports] initiative that the Generalitat de Catalunya has been promoting for some time, created specifically to save sports fonds all over Catalonia.

All of this concluded with refreshments at the so-called “Arxibar”, a place where we offered participants sports drinks, snacks, and other treats to celebrate the successful completion of the event on a festive note. By the way, there was no winning team, but rather everyone went home with a certificate of participation. As we said, it was an activity designed for all audiences, with an educational component, but most of all, it was an activity where competition quickly turned into enjoyment and fun.

