

The archives of rural football. For a history of sport in the villages

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Between the years 1920 and 1950, sport in the town of Valclusa was defined as «peasant football». While rural populations have not attracted much attention from football, and even less, sport historians¹, except for rare exceptions², asking about how football was played in an agricultural area can help us understand the process of people from the countryside accessing sport during the first part of the 20th century.

To write a history «from the ground up» of football in the Valclusa area, it was necessary to research the archives. If, in 1989, Alfred Wahl complained «that no body forces the leaders [of the thousands of football clubs scattered throughout the national territory] to keep their resolutions»³, this history of rural football has been possible because of access to unpublished sources, thanks to a network of contacts: it has been possible to compile oral archives and collect private handwritten and iconographic sources, with the collaboration of former players and managers. In some cases, players or coaches who have kept photographs, match reports and press articles. As for former managers, mainly presidents, secretaries and treasurers, they have kept administrative documents with lists of players and managers, notebooks for monitoring teams with descriptions of training sessions, of matches with team lineups, scorers, correspondence with institutions and other clubs, accounting records detailing match tickets paid and club income and expenses.

Although the clubs' archives are «essential and unique to build a history of the sport dedicated to its main and most numerous leading names»⁴, very few have been preserved in Valclusa.

¹ Paul DIETSCHY points out that «in a country where the urban population did not start to become a majority until 1931, [football] remained the sport of the city, while cycling, thanks to road racing and the Tour de France, remained the spectator sport that was held, and has always been held, in the countryside», *Histoire du football* ('History of football'), Paris, Perrin publishing house, 2014 (2010), p. 509.

² Tony FROISSART, *L'impasse du sport rural : La Seine-et-Oise de 1881 à 1939*, Besançon, Editorial PUF, 2006, i Arnaud WAQUET, «Football rural en guerre : la leçon de football des Tommies dans les villages de la Somme et du Pas-de-Calais (1918-1921)», a Luc ROBENE, *Le sport et la guerre XIX^e et XX^e siècles*, Editorial Rennes, PUR, pag. 297-307; «1918 : Football en guerre, football des campagnes», *Inflexions*, 2012/1, n. 19, p. 133-141.

³ Alfred WAHL, *Les archives du football*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁴ Bernard PRETET, «Les archives du Racing Club de France et du Stade Français»; Françoise BOSMAN, Patrick CLASTRES, Paul DIETSCHY, *Le sport : de l'archive à l'histoire*, Besançon, PUF, 2006, p. 209.

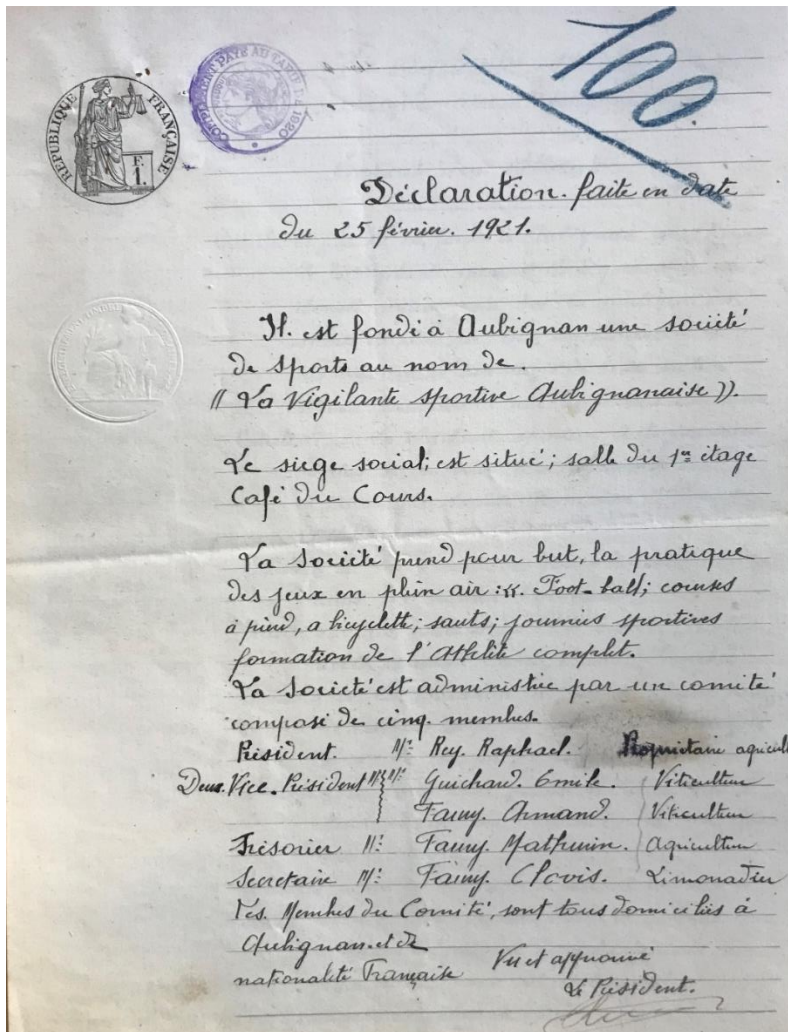
In this sense, the USR Pertuis (Union Sportive Renaissance Pertuisienne) is the exception. This club has very valuable archives for the period from the mid-1940s to the mid-1980s. All this is mainly due to René Gallian, member of the board of directors and general secretary between 1948 and 1992, who kept the documents of the statutes, the meetings of the board of directors, the minutes of the general assemblies, the books tracking all club equipment, account books and membership register, press articles and photographs. The statutes and the minutes of the meetings of the board of directors, as well as the teams' monitoring books, have been scrupulously drawn up and preserved. They constitute one of the richest sources, due to the great diversity of information they contain: statutes, number and lists of members per year, price of the quota, finance and budget issues, facilities management, projects and reports of various sporting or festive events, day-to-day administrative problems, team composition, results and match analysis. The lists of members and the composition of the teams since 1948 are an extraordinary source on the entity's sociological evolution. In the case of SOC Villelaure, the archives that have been preserved, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s, thanks to the founding family, the Ricards, are as numerous as those of the neighboring and rival club, the USRP⁵. They have also another type of information on the operation and sociology of a rural club with a mainly agricultural population until the 1960s⁶. So, it is easy to see how clubs' sports archives can contribute to the history of a society while bearing witness to it.

We would like to emphasize that our research is not limited solely to private sources. We have searched in other archives, with greater or less success, in the departmental archives of Valcluse, in the municipal and communal archives of many cities and towns. Our visits to the district of Provence, Grand Valcluse and the Mediterranean Football League were not very fruitful. Although the earliest documents date back to the 1920s for the League and the 1930s for the district of Provence, for the district of Grand Valcluse, information before the 1960s is very sporadic. On the other hand, the local and regional press, in particular the sports press, has been a very fruitful source of information.

⁵ Romain GARDI and Lionel GAMBIA, *Le siècle de l'USR Pertuis. Une histoire populaire du football en Provence (1920-2020)*, Forcalquier, Editions C'est-à-dire, 2020.



The players of the ESA Villelaure team, 1926-1927.



ADV 3 Z 96, Founding act of the VS association of Aubignan, 25 February 1921.