

<https://francearchives.gouv.fr/fr/article/667843638>

## **The Great Collection of Sports Archives in France: an opportunity to enrich national and local memory?**

The [Great Collection of Sports Archives](#) is based on the observation by the historians who complain about the lack of sports-related sources in public archives. Inspired by the success obtained by the Great Collection organized on the occasion of the centenary of the First World War (2013-2018), this new project seems to have the same ingredients that could predict good success: a national event that would be prepared for several years, a non-problematic issue that mainly affects all French people. Everyone has memories of their physical education classes, their first strokes, applauding on the roadside in the Tour de France or the moments of unity experienced in front of the television during the competitions. Sport also affects all aspects of society, from politics and the economy to industry, health and fashion. On the basis of these facts, the Interministerial Service of the Archives of France (SIAF) launched the operation called the Great Collection of Sports Archives, during the month of June 2022, with support from the French National Olympic Academy (ANOF) and the French National Sports and Olympic Committee (in French CNOSF). The operation is one of the main projects run by the Ministry of Culture within the so-called "Cultural Olympics".

More than 185 national, departmental and municipal archive services participate in this operation throughout the French territory, including overseas departments. The conditions of participation are left to the departments' discretion, regarding the duration of the collection, the type of documents selected, the choice of sports topics and the type of public they want to reach. Do some biases work better than others?

One of the biggest challenges of this Great Collection is to identify the protagonists of the world of sport and then convince them to entrust their archives to a public service. Faced with disinterest or a lack of knowledge of the value of their heritage by the people far removed from the concerns of memory, can a strategy be adopted? Although there are similarities with the Great Collection 1914-1918, the Great Collection of Sports Archives has its own characteristics in terms of the diversity of donors, themes and territorial roots. In principle, objects are excluded from the collection, because they belong to the scope of museums, but on a case-by-case basis, certain non-bulky objects that are closely linked to the archives can be accepted. The notion of files is complicated. Clubs still think of posters and photographs, not general meetings, meeting minutes or membership lists.

In parallel with the collection, many departments have carried out a far-reaching program to promote the sports archives, either by digitizing documents and writing source guides to give visibility to the material already present in their collections, or producing exhibitions, publications, conferences and shows. The Games are an opportunity to capture a different audience and show them that sport can also be found in the archives, with its territorial peculiarities. How can we communicate this improvement and respond to the specifications that may be requested by the local authority on which the archives department depends?

The communication task behind this Great Collection of Sports Archives is also carried out on a national scale. Because of its status as project coordinator, the SIAF works on a communication policy to reach national and regional channels, so that the project reaches the largest number of people possible. What kind of help can a central State department, such as the SIAF, which depends on the Ministry of Culture, give the archive departments for a project with great local impact, where the objective is not to collect, but to coordinate and advise? Beyond physical communication through different media (videos, postcards, news, articles), what is the role of exchange and relationships? And to which people and means should it be addressed in order to gain in impact and visibility?

The visibility of archives also involves archival operations of description and indexing, which are based on common vocabularies and harmonized and aligned authorities. Currently, many questions are under consideration: is it necessary to encourage the combination of concepts through cross-indexing? Should the list of sports disciplines accepted in the thesaurus of subjects be expanded? Is it necessary to feminize the indexing of sports names?

Communication goes hand in hand with assessment. The SIAF has a portal, FranceArchives, which allows it to simultaneously promote the archives and actions of the different departments. A reflection on the development of new pages on sport led to the creation of the "[Archives and sport](#)" section, which includes practical information on participating in the operation, such as "Entrusting your sports archives: what, where and how?", tips on how to collect oral testimonies or start searches in sports archives, as well as games and a page showcasing promotional projects throughout the country.

It should be noted that special attention has been paid to the school public: creation of educational documents on various topics and a joint call for projects with the Ministry of National Education, which allows students to contribute to enriching the memory of sport while working on documents.

Finally, if the Great Collection of Sports Archives is an action aimed at private collections, this project allows archival services to also question the collection of public archives related to sports, and to get in touch with structures that had not necessarily been addressed until now. However, whether they

are public or private archives, the collection leads to analyzing legal aspects such as intellectual property, image rights or personal data, which must be taken into account when using the documents.

[Two research programs](#) have been launched with the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS in French) and its Institute of Political Social Sciences (of the Paris-Nanterre University). The first project is a sociological study of the Great Collection. The field surveys observe what are the drivers and contours of citizen participation in the constitution of archives' funds, as well as the motivations and perspectives of the archivists who implement these initiatives. Who are the donors, what is their relationship with sport and memory? Why has this archive service taken over the Great Collection and how does it work within the team? The second project aims to collect the oral testimonies of the leaders of the French sports federations, which are almost non-existent in public funds. This work has two main aims: to study the trajectories of the leaders and the functioning mechanisms of the federations, while raising leaders' awareness of the need to preserve their personal and institutional archives, with a view to a donation or a transfer with financial compensation.

The aim of this work in the IV International Seminar of the ICA Sports Section is to present a first assessment of the Great Collection of Sports Archives, to give some answers to the questions raised and, along the way, discover the perspectives it offers to research into the history of sport and the knowledge of sports practice in France, to enter into the "legacy" of the Games.

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### Photo captions

- Photo 1: *Poster of Eugène Maës' swimming school on the banks of the Orne river in Caen, 1930s. (Calvados departmental archives, 25fi/282/1)*
- Photo 2: *Gymnasts from the Abeilles Sportives de Tours during an exhibition in Beauregard Park in Rochecorbon, 1930s. (Departmental archives of Indre and Loire, FRAD037\_4NUM174\_001)*
- Photo 3: *Photograph of a football team from French Guiana, n.d. (Territorial archives of French Guiana, 5\_Num\_35\_J)*
- Photo 4: *Bird hunting record, 1805. (Departmental Archives of the Aisne, 1 J 838)*