

Book Review/Reseña

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Muertes, funerales, biografías póstumas y deportes en la Argentina (siglos XX y XXI). Tomo 1, La invención del panteón deportivo. Edited by Pablo Ariel Scharagrodsky and César R. Torres. Buenos Aires: Prometeo Editorial, 2025. ISBN 978-631-6604-77-4. 266 pp.

How has a sporting pantheon been created in Argentina over the last century? This question motivates a new edited volume by Pablo Ariel Scharagrodsky and César R. Torres that delves into the relationship between sports, death, and posthumous representation. The contributors examine the media coverage, cultural narratives, and popular manifestations of grief and acclaim that emerged after the deaths of key sporting figures. The volume shows how a sporting pantheon is constructed through contested processes of meaning-making tied to biographical selection, narration, forgetting, and reinvention. Following an introduction by the editors and a prologue by historian Sandra Gayol, chapters are devoted to boxers, an aviator, a racecar driver, and a soccer superstar.



Muertes, funerales, biografías póstumas y deportes en la Argentina (siglos XX y XXI)
Tomo 1

La invención del panteón deportivo

Pablo Ariel Scharagrodsky
César R. Torres
(compiladores)

 **prometeo**
editorial

/ colección: cultura física y sociedad /

Scharagrodsky shows how the deaths of two sportsmen laid the initial foundations for a sporting pantheon in Argentina. Jorge Newberry (1875–1914) gained fame as a pilot of hot-air balloons and airplanes, setting a new world record for altitude in 1914. Newberry's death in an airplane crash—just three weeks after setting the aviation record—generated an outpouring of sorrow. The government, military, and sports institutions constructed his death as a national tragedy,

granting him a state funeral. The press accorded Newberry preeminent status as the “first Argentine sportsman” (33). Justo Suárez (1909–1938) gained fame as a world-class boxer fighting in national and foreign arenas. He died young due to tuberculosis, and his funeral attracted tens of thousands of people. The posthumous biography of Suárez emphasized his escape from poverty, boxing his way into prominence, and garnering the respect of the lower and working classes. Suárez became the “first popular sports idol” in Argentina, as well as a symbol of the *criollo* boxer: the unschooled, instinctive streetfighter (69).

The volume then explores four sports heroes spanning the mid to late twentieth century. Daniel Sazbón’s chapter on boxing sensation José María Gatica (1925–1963) examines a “fallen idol” (106). The posthumous biography of Gatica emphasized his humble origins, a boxing career that brought fame, and the subsequent loss of his fortune. Gatica was inscribed into national memory as a Peronist boxing idol.

David M. K. Sheinin’s chapter assesses the death of racecar driver Juan Gálvez (1916–1963) against the backdrop of the changing industry of motor racing. Gálvez won nine championships on the Turismo Carretera racing circuit before dying during a competition. Gálvez was posthumously represented in relation to his courage and willingness to risk death.

Scharagrodsky and Torres’s chapter investigates the boxing legacy of Oscar Bonavena (1942–1976). Though never a world champion, Bonavena gained a mass following as a heavyweight fighter who battled renowned figures such as Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali. Bonavena’s biography was centered on the ideals of the Argentine macho against the backdrop of the fractious sex and gender politics of the 1960s and 1970s.

Jonathan Palla’s contribution focuses on Carlos Monzón (1942–1995), who was a world champion, middleweight boxer during the 1970s. Monzón was Argentina’s most successful champion pugilist. He was beloved by the masses as a fighter of humble origins from the interior. Monzón gained fame and infamy due to his celebrity friendships, strained marriages, and history of violence. In the wake of his death in a car accident, Monzon’s biography brought into relief sporting success alongside gender-based violence as an issue of national concern in Argentina.

The volume concludes with two essays on soccer superstar Diego Maradona (1960–2020). Verónica Moreira and Leandro Maseda explore the journalistic invention of the *criollo* style embodied by Maradona. This style is associated with wunderkind players who develop individualistic creativity and virtuosic dribbling skills in urban streets, fields, and abandoned lots. Maradona’s legacy is closely tied to Argentina’s World Cup championship in 1986 and two goals against arch-rival England: the “Hand of God Goal” and the “Goal of the Century.” The latter is an iconic representation of *criollo* style in action. They

discuss the ritual significance of Maradona's death in November 2020, the mass gatherings that occurred despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the wake at the presidential palace, the funeral procession and burial at the Jardín de Bella Vista. Pablo Alabarces's essay addresses Maradona's playing career with SSC Napoli and the two championships he won in the Italian Serie A league. Alabarces meditates on the Neapolitan civic love for Maradona as a unifying figure who became something akin to a popular saint, remembered through songs, murals, statues, and makeshift altars.

The edited volume contributes to the scholarship on Argentine sporting history through its close engagement and analysis of death, memory, and posthumous representation. Readers will come away with a conceptual and historical appreciation for how a sporting pantheon is an unstable "performative fiction" grounded in conjunctural dynamics of the moment (12). One limitation of the volume is the singular focus on men in mainstream, popular sports. The editors themselves recognize this limitation in the coverage of the chapters. Indeed, this speaks to the hegemonic framing of sporting merit in Argentina, which is structured by masculinist subjectivities and power relations assembled and reaffirmed by the mass media.

This volume will also be of interest to scholars of sports culture. The chapters provide insight into the cultural politics of death, examining wakes, funerals, and memorialization efforts in relation to fraught issues of class, gender, race, partisan politics, and celebrity.

Ultimately, the volume raises the prospect of a global sporting pantheon. Indeed, Maradona's legacy transcends the memorialization framework in Argentina proper, speaking to a global significance underpinned by sports capitalism, media discourses, addiction, fame, and, at times, symbolism as a proponent of equality in the fight against the powerful.

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