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ORIGINAL

JOSÉ ENRIQUE RODRÍGUEZ CAL: FIRST SPANISH MEDALIST OF OLYMPIC BOXING

JOSÉ ENRIQUE RODRÍGUEZ CAL: PRIMER MEDALLISTA ESPAÑOL DE BOXEO OLÍMPICO

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ABSTRACT

This article is part of the research on the historical reconstruction of the sporting career of José Enrique Rodríguez Cal, the first Spanish boxing medalist. The methodology was developed from the documentary analysis of primary sources, interviews and discussion groups with the subsequent process of contrast and triangulation. The result is the recovery of the historical circumstances of the national boxing team of that period and a unique, original and unprecedented rescue of a fragment of "life history" of Rodríguez Cal, covering one of the many shortcomings of the History of the Spanish sports. The precarious conditions in that period in terms of materials, facilities and training, as well as the origin of disadvantaged socio-economic environments were common aspects among boxers at that time, being a unique precedent the achievement of an Olympic medal in this sport discipline.

KEYWORDS: Spanish boxing, amateur boxing, Olympic Games, boxing history

RESUMEN

Este artículo parte del trabajo de investigación sobre la reconstrucción histórica de la trayectoria deportiva de José Enrique Rodríguez Cal, primer medallista de boxeo español. La metodología se desarrolló a partir del análisis documental de fuentes primarias, entrevistas y grupos de discusión con el proceso posterior de contraste y triangulación. El resultado supone la recuperación de las circunstancias históricas del equipo nacional de boxeo de aquel periodo y un rescate único, original e inédito de un fragmento de la “historia de vida” deportiva de Rodríguez Cal, cubriendo una de las múltiples lagunas de la Historia del Deporte español. Las condiciones precarias en aquel periodo en cuanto a los materiales, instalaciones y entrenamientos, así como la procedencia de entornos socio-económicos desfavorecidos eran aspectos comunes entre los boxeadores en aquel momento, suponiendo un precedente único el logro de una medalla olímpica en esta disciplina deportiva.

PALABRAS CLAVE: boxeo español, boxeo amateur, Juegos Olímpicos, historia del boxeo

1 INTRODUCTION

After the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, there was a surge of interest in boxing. A group of pugilists emerged that were known as the "post-war generation" (Meyer and Girard, 1996). That historic heyday was the basis of the most brilliant periods of Spanish boxing: the sixties and seventies. In 1972, at the Olympic Games in Munich, the first Olympic boxing medal was won by Spanish amateur José Enrique Rodríguez Cal (Calle-Molina, 2016).

The scarcity of resources was always present in the daily life of those who started boxing in Spain during those years and it was a common feature among the members of the national amateur boxing team of that period, something which was also suffered by Rodríguez Cal: lack of material resources and sports facilities, precariousness in human resources and training of coaches, lack of financial support, etc. However, the good work and the hope managed in his case to achieve goals was almost impossible to imagine.

2 DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCH

The objectives of this research were to know the historical circumstances of the sports context of Enrique Rodríguez Cal and to rescue the events that occurred until he achieved the historic milestone of being the first Spanish Olympic boxing medalist.

For this, a documentary analysis of primary sources was developed, as well as the obtainment, analysis and contrast of his personal archive. In addition, interviews and discussion groups were conducted, with a posterior contrast of information obtained from primary oral and documentary sources through the triangulation of data from other sources.

3 THE SPORTING FIRST STEPS OF RODRÍGUEZ CAL & THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF SPANISH AMATEUR BOXING IN THE SIXTIES

José Enrique Rodríguez Cal was born in a working-class neighborhood of Avilés (Asturias). Under the influence of his older brother, an amateur boxer, he frequently visited "La Avestica Avilesina" where he trained. In his testimony he remembered it thus:

I started following in the wake of my brother Avelino, who was seven years older than me and he was the one who started boxing and I accompanied him. I remember that I was carrying the suitcase, I was the one that cleaned the gloves and the one that rolled the bandages. And that's how it started, following my brother (Rodríguez Cal, 2015).

Enrique's interest in sports started at the same place where he began his trainings. At night he worked as a baker and in the afternoon he trained in boxing. He walked a few miles on foot to the training place wearing his brother's clothes and his, since his brother went directly from work to training. The shortage of resources did not allow him to make any extra expenses on the bus.

The precariousness of the sports facilities in that town of Asturias were important. The material and equipment used were in common use. The economic conditions did not allow for own material, so it was shared by all the boxers in the gym. With amusing gestures, Rodríguez Cal reminisced in an interview those first years:

There were no gyms or sports centers. I remember we had hot water which at the time was almost unthinkable! Very bad places, no hangers, very bad gyms ... There was no shower room, there was a jerrycan. I will not forget it in my life. A large can. From the bar came a hose on the floor and it climbed up the drum, filled it with water and underneath, a hole and a cork. In summer it worked, but in winter ... (Rodríguez Cal, 2015).

That example rescued from the memories of Enrique Rodríguez, explained the only possibility they were given to clean themselves "as if with a shower" after training: a drum filled with cold water, which was dropped after removing a cork, in a sort of store next to the bar of that small town. These anecdotes illustrate the conditions in which those amateur athletes developed daily. Circumstances that were common in the boxers who started the surge of interest in boxing as aforementioned in previous paragraphs, that Meyer and Girard (1996) described as the "postwar generation".

Other boxers from that era, also primary sources of this work, remembered similar circumstances. Thus, Antonio Domínguez Gutiérrez, who started as an amateur boxer in the basement of Hogar de Ciales, which was located on Calle Ramón y Cajal de Gijón, recalled:

There was not even a place to bathe, there were no showers. You came, sweated and then went home to bathe. Then we went to a gym that at least had water. It was a reservoir of water as in the village houses. It was water, a faucet and also cold water. It was what we had ... (Domínguez Gutiérrez, 2015).

On the other hand, the coaches of the athletes did not receive any economic compensation for their work. According to Rodríguez Cal, "everything was done for hobby", both by the fighters, and by those responsible for their physical and technical preparation. The only incentive was the taste and the hope they put on, which allowed them to overcome the important shortage of resources and overcome the mental and physical harshness of their practice (Rodríguez Cal, 2015).

Antonio Domínguez, also made reference to the similar circumstances that he lived in Gijón:

In my gym there was one that was pretty good; Rodolfo García, who came to fight for the title of champion of Spain here in Gijón. We were all humble people. We were all kids working. Some of them worked as bakers, others worked like me as an adjuster mechanic, my friend Justo worked in the bohemia blower, making glass... The coach did not get

paid as far as I knew. The coach was a guy who liked the sport and had been in Madrid preparing to play sports, I do not think he even boxed at all. We did not get paid, we were never paid anything at the gym. The coach was called Pirulo. He worked at the *La Viada* factory, as a glass blower (Domínguez Gutiérrez, 2015).

Those circumstances give a special value to the achievements of those "fans" and to the historic milestone of Rodríguez Cal's extraordinary triumph. Members of the 1972 Munich national team emerged from similar conditions. With those circumstances, reaching the level that implied Olympic participation, it was already a surprising fact that speaks volumes of the special human qualities of those young people. The first Olympic medal that Rodríguez Cal obtained with those conditions of maximum precariousness, was really "a dream", but not a miracle. It was something achieved with much effort, sacrifice and hope until achieving "the unattainable." A valuable "lesson" offered by a generation of athletes.

In addition to the sports milestones achieved, those "amateur trainers" and those "improvised gyms" also played an important social and educational role among those young people who had few opportunities for positive orientation. Rodríguez Cal, with the passage of time and personal maturity, reflected in the interview that the sport provided them with experiences that were certainly formative for them and definitely beneficial for the rest of their lives that, given the opportunities that were offered by their surroundings, they would not have had anywhere else. It was there that they oriented their hobbies towards sports. A sports practice that started from the respect to the established norms, with which they learned discipline and respect. There they socialized and exercised in techniques that served them for their bodily development and that, with the perspective of time elapsed, they are now recognized by many of them who feel it formed them as people, it transmitted important values and gave them the possibility of finding personal aspects of self-esteem they had not found elsewhere in the environment in which they developed.

Domínguez Gutiérrez, already mentioned, recalled those three years that he trained as a boxer as one of the happiest stages of his life, which although it did not serve him to obtain any economic benefit, had given him a vision of life and vital perspectives that were very useful to him, from the norms and the approaches that the coach transmitted:

Our coach, Pirulo, demanded that we be young, and not drink nor smoke and that you wanted to do it. The gym reminded me of good things. First, I think that thanks to the gym I do not drink, because we went with friends on Saturday and Sunday, after boxing, to eat cakes and milk after going to the dance and after dancing ... I did not drink or smoke and it was good enough for me. It worked for me, I took care of myself, and it never bothered me. I, if they did not hit me, would not hit back. Those were the rules that the coach told me: " try, after training, if the look to have ago at you to not punch back. Just avoid it, avoid, avoid. You try not to let go of your hand, ever. Now, if you have no choice, do not let yourself be beaten. But try not to hit anyone, which is not good, neither for you nor

for the other person." And it never happened... Boxing was something I loved (Domínguez Gutiérrez, 2015).

There are numerous aspects related to the practice of boxing that many of these amateur boxers today recognize that were definitely positive for them in their lives.

4 THE SPANISH BOXING AT THE MUNICH OLYMPIC GAMES 1972: HISTORICAL RECOVERY OF THE FACTS AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF THAT STAGE IN AMATEUR SPORT STAGE

4.1 TRAINING OF THE NATIONAL BOXING TEAM

Manuel Santacruz Socas, wanted the national team to prepare for a pre-Olympic game. Precise steps were taken to hold meetings with international teams before August, the month in which the Olympic Games began in Munich (ABC, 1972). On 13 February 1972 at the Jay-Alay venue in Zaragoza, an international boxing match was held between the two pre-Olympic teams from Spain and Wales. The Spanish team won nine wins against one. Enrique Rodríguez Cal, at light flyweight, beat the Welshman Jeffery Pritchard by points (Alfil, 1972a). Another meeting took place on 26 February. In this one the Spanish team faced the Scottish in Gijón, with a result in favor of 9 victories to 2, although Enrique did not participate (Alfil, 1972b, Rodríguez Cal, 2016). In the weeks leading up to the Munich Games, the National Amateur Boxing Team was concentrated at the Peñagrande Hotel (Figure 1). The objective was to carry out a joint training led by coach Manuel Santacruz Socas, known as "Palenque", so that the Olympic team could follow a routine of training, feeding and favorable practices to achieve the best performance.

Figure 1. Members of the National Amateur Boxing Team during the pre-Olympic 1972 Munich concentration at the Peñagrande Hotel, Torrelodones (Madrid). From left to right: Enrique Rodríguez Cal, José Sánchez Escudero, Juan Francisco Rodríguez, unidentified canary fighter, Gerónimo de Lucas, Cristóbal Rosado, Alfonso Fernández, Moisés Fajardo, Martin Cendon and José Gálvez. Below: Ángel Molinero (assistant), Manuel Santacruz Socas "Palenque" (coach) and Andrés (assistant). Photo of the personal file of Enrique Rodríguez Cal.



4.2 1972 MUNICH OLYMPIC GAMES

From August 26 to September 11, the XX Summer Olympic Games were held in the city of Munich, then located in West Germany. According to the sources of the Spanish Olympic Committee, Spain presented a delegation of 125 athletes. Of the ten boxers who had been concentrated in Torrelodones only five were selected. On the one hand, because two fighters of the same weight could not attend, and on the other, because the Federation only sent those who had a chance at winning. Rodríguez Cal recalled that "in the rest of weights there were no boxers of quality in Spain, for this reason there never was a complete Spanish team in the Olympic Games" (2015). Therefore, the Olympic team that came to Munich was made up of five boxers: lightweight, Enrique Rodríguez Cal, Antonio Garcia, bantamweight, Juan Francisco Rodríguez, featherweight, Antonio Rubio and welterweight Alfonso Fernández (Figure 2). The National Coach was Manuel Santacruz accompanied by his assistant and a masseur (Rodríguez Cal, 2015).

In the previous selection, there were certain doubts in the lightfly category. There were two boxers in the National Team for the same category: Jose Sánchez Escudero and Jose Enrique Rodríguez Cal. The National Coach was in favor of the latter, but the Olympic Committee and the National Delegation of Physical Education and Sports preferred Jose Sánchez. A few days before going to Munich neither of them knew who was going to go to the Olympic Games. "We both had the tailored suits which we would wear with the national team" (Rodríguez Cal, 2015). Enrique Rodríguez remembered how he learned, a week beforehand and through the sports press of his designation: "one day, in the morning, after breakfast ... we are chatting and I catch AS, and I see the photograph of five boxers there and I read: at light flyweight Rodríguez Cal will go to Munich" (Ibídem).

In the interview with him we remembered the images on television of Abebe Bikila, barefoot and successful. They were the first I had seen of those events. Then it was when he began to have the hope, almost like a dream, to go to the Olympic Games. Later, when he lived his stay in the Olympic Village like a dream come true, he met Abebe Bikila, already in a wheelchair, along with other famous athletes like Johnny Weissmüller. Those experiences caused by his attendance at the Games caused in that young man a huge impact, which with his recollection in the interviews still transformed his face. Only the facts of flying in an airplane or wearing an elegant suit with the emblem of the Spanish team were for that Asturian of 20 years something unforgettable. Today, with the perspective of the time elapsed, he reflected on the opportunity and the amplitude of personal perspectives that for him meant so much and that at the time made him feel "in another world" (Rodríguez Cal, 2015).

The structure and layout of the Munich Olympic Village were highly praised by the press. The analysis of the hemerographic sources used in this work testifies to this. They especially emphasized the proximity between all the facilities, since they intended their reuse after finishing the Games. Tamayo Fajardo (2005) states that "it was composed of eight hundred apartments in an

eighteen-storey building, and another eight hundred apartments located in a row of especially attractive bungalows. Its capacity was for 12,000 people "(p.172). Recreation areas were created to promote socialization among athletes from different countries, in order to fulfill the objectives that modern Olympism proposes (Calle-Molina and Martínez-Gorroño, 2014).

Enrique remembered having related to athletes of many countries. Despite not speaking English, using gestures, shared activities he met many personalities of the time (Rodríguez Cal, 2015, 2016).



Figure 2. Selection of boxing that represented Spain in the Olympic Games of Munich 1972 with the official equipment. From left to right: the National Selector and preparer, Manuel Santacruz "Palenque", Alfonso Fernandez, Antonio Rubio, Juan Francisco Rodríguez, Antonio García and Enrique Rodríguez Cal. Photo of the personal archive of Enrique Rodríguez Cal.

4.3 ENRIQUE RODRÍGUEZ CAL'S OLYMPIC PARTICIPATION

In the first round he had to face Alexandru Turei. That circumstance was not positive, the information collected from the sources indicated it was as an important inconvenience. Agustín Antuña Suárez, as a witness of those Games affirmed: "Cal had no luck. He was given a draw against Romanian Turei, who had been proclaimed champion of Europe two months previously"(Antuña Suárez, s.f., p.108).

On Monday, August 28, at 8:10 p.m., the three-round bout began. The specialists described the beginning of the development as a very even combat, although both contenders showed a very different technique. In the last two rounds the match had long periods of "melee" short distances in which Enrique remembered feeling more secure. The final result was that three judges ruled in favor of Enrique and two in favor of Alexandru. The points awarded to Enrique

were: 58, 59, 59, 60, 59 and Alexandru's were: 59, 58, 58, 57 and 60. Therefore, Rodríguez Cal won by points and thus went on to the next round, 1972a).

Two days before their second match, on September 5 at the Olympic Village there was a terrible event provoked by a Palestinian terrorist group: Black September (ABC, 1972b). Under the name of an alleged operation "Berem and lkrit" they broke into the accommodation of the Israeli delegation taking Israeli athletes hostage. The result of that attack was fifteen deaths: nine hostages, five terrorists and one German policeman (COE, 1971). The International Olympic Committee, after seriously considering the suspension of that edition of the Games, decided to suspend only the sports activities for that day. Following the resumption the next day, sports events scheduled to be held on September 5 were postponed to later days.

Rodríguez Cal recalled that, like many other athletes, they did not realize what happened as a result of the sheer size of the Olympic Village. "The Spaniards did not know anything. What we did learn was that later, the Olympic Village, more than an Olympic Village of athletes seemed more like the army" (Rodríguez Cal, 2015). After the arrival of the terrorist group at dawn, on the 5th, the Spanish Boxing Team, in the morning, accompanied by the coach, went to the dining room to have breakfast. On the way they were able to see numerous policemen who informed them of what happened and demanded that they return to their pavilion and not go outside.

Two days after these events, the Spanish team joined the resumption of the Games as the rest of athletes, (Rodríguez Cal, 2015) and the second match of Enrique against Davey Lee Armstrong took place. The American had a stature much superior to the one of the Spaniard, 1.74 Vs. 1,55 meters. That aspect was really shocking to Cal, who remembered the impression it gave him to see a North American, famous by its victories, of such a scale, waving to the public in his gown. About his feelings at the time, he reflected on these terms:

I saw him like this in the ring with the American dressing gown and waving, he gave a little of ... but of course ... I remember that when he took off his robe ... a man who weighs forty-eight kilos and measures one seventy-four you have to feel sorry for him. Sure, I was smaller, but I was strong (Rodríguez Cal, 2015).

Enrique remembered this combat as one of the simplest. In spite of the respect imposed on him by his height, along with his fame as a good boxer, he soon realized that his height was not a favorable aspect and was conditioned his low weight. The jury ruled with a 5 to 0 in favor of Cal, who went on to the next round (Enrique, 2015, 2016).

In the quarterfinals he fought against Rafael Carbonell (Figure 3). This fight was seen by himself and by his coach as especially difficult. The Cubans always had fame of quality boxers. Enrique, remembered that combat as the best that he has done in the amateur field (Enrique, 2015). In the second round he began to

bleed through his nose. After stopping the fight twice, the doctor clogged the bleeding and gave him permission to continue. The media of the time testify that Enrique used predominantly his right hand in spite of being lefty. The jury scored: 59, 60, 60, 60, 60 for Enrique and 59, 58, 59, 56, 58 for Rafael, resulting in 4 to 1. Therefore, that result meant a new victory for Rodríguez Cal (G. 1972). That victory was already the greatest historical landmark of Spanish Olympic boxing. It meant that Rodríguez Cal had already obtained the first Olympic medal for Spain achieved in an Olympic Games by a boxer. But it also gave him opportunity to opt for the silver medal.

Figure 3. From left to right Enrique Rodríguez Cal boxing against Rafael Carbonell at the Boxhall during the 1972 Munich Olympic Games. Photo of the personal archive of José Enrique Rodríguez Cal.



Therefore, on September 8th Enrique Rodríguez disputed his next bout. The information gathered regarding its development, attests that the first round was very evenly matched, but in the second round, the Iranian referee Kouchar Karapet admonished Enrique for hindering the fight. An admonition implied that a point had to be subtracted from Enrique, who, in that round and until that moment, was leading the score. The match was closed with the third round which indicated a very similar level. The referees' decision was as follows: for Enrique 59, 59, 59, 59, 59 and for Kim 58, 59, 58, 60 and 59.

That fight aroused much controversy. Two judges ruled in favor of Enrique, two of them tied the match and only one ruled in favor of the Korean (Gilera, 1972b). The two members of the jury who tied the match, according to Olympic regulations, had to tip their draw in favor of one of the boxers, and both bowed to U. Gil Kim. That result left the Spaniard with the bronze medal and without the possibility of opting for the silver medal. So, even though the Korean boxer lost in the final score, the inclination of these two jurors made him finally get the silver medal (El Mundo Deportivo, 1972). Enrique remembered especially that at the end of the fight there was a certain commotion and a long wait,

something unusual, to inform the resolution of the fight, which had undoubtedly raised doubts among the controversial judges.

Antuñía Suárez (sf), a witness of the events, recalled that "this verdict raised great protests among the public and even led to the later revision of the system of punctuation adopted" (Antuñía Suárez, sf, p.110).). To this day, Rodríguez Cal says he still does not understand the voting system. However, in spite of that irregularity, he recalls that he was enormously happy with the bronze medal, because it was something that previously had been thought to be unattainable for him. This medal was the greatest of all hopes, despite the strange circumstances of that last battle.

Therefore, Cal returned to Spain having obtained a bronze medal. It was the first time that a Spanish boxer won a medal in the Olympic Games and, as a result, that triumph was a unique historical milestone in the history of Spanish boxing (IOC, Enrique, 2016). But, in addition to implicating the historical milestone mentioned, it also meant a great victory at the national level, since that bronze medal was the only one that Spain won in those Games in Munich. Rodríguez Cal returned with the rest of the national team to Barajas airport and on September 12 arrived in Avilés, his usual place of residence. The Federation tried to keep him in Madrid for a few days to celebrate the important result of his Olympic victory, but Enrique chose not to delay his return to his native Asturias, to celebrate with his family and friends. In the Norte station of Oviedo he was received by a crowd of friends from the Avilesina Athletic, the sports club where he developed his boxing career, continuing to welcome acts, dinners, tributes, etc. (Cuervo, 2015).

Rodríguez Cal recalled the special feelings that result produced. Never before had he come to think that he could return with an Olympic medal. For him, the experience and the great hope of going to the Olympic Games was sufficiently important and extraordinary, an experience that was already a dream in itself and had given him great joy. Taking into account the circumstances in which his sporting practice developed, it had already been a triumph to be part of the National Olympic Team of Spain, to wear the equipment, to travel outside Spain as a representative of his country and to participate in the Olympic Games. To that fabulous experience for someone of his age and his environment and circumstances were joined other extraordinary experiences that the Spaniard lived for the first time in 20 years, and were unique, such as getting on a plane "and carry that emblem here (he points at the chest) and say that I'm going to be an Olympian, I'm in the medals, well let's not imagine it "(Rodríguez Cal, 2015).

After winning the bronze medal, Enrique remembered in the interview we kept with these words, everything that happened after that achievement:

And this medal that is here (pointing to the bronze medal that is in a box on the table), well it opened up my life, opened the doors as we say here. So I have to be very grateful (Rodríguez Cal, 2015).

Thanks to the Olympic medal, he went from concentrating on the national team for times, not having a job and waiting for the military service (Cuervo, 2015) to receive ESP 310,000 (Rodríguez Cal, 2015), as a consequence of that triumph. With that money, he was able to buy a flat in Versailles, Aviles, in order to be able to become independent with his wife, with whom he had just married and with whom he had his first son (Antuña Suárez, s.f.).

The testimony of Enrique Rodriguez offered us all the information on the changes that that Olympic victory supposed to him. Until then, he had received no help from the National Delegation of Physical Education and Sports. Those 310,000 pesetas were the first economic compensation he received. On his trip to Madrid to collect the check, he also decided to take the opportunity to speak personally with Juan Gich Bech de Careda, who had been president of the Spanish delegation at the Munich Games. He let him know that the real prize for him would be a job at ENSIDESA, a steel company, which gave fixed jobs to a significant number of Asturians. That was what would ensure him a fixed livelihood that would enable him to secure some income for the maintenance of his family. However, that request went unnoticed at that time (Enrique, 2015). Rodríguez Cal had reflected on his future and imagined that his sports career would not bring him enough income to support his future family in the long run, circumstances that represented a definitive personal and professional conditioning (Petit, 2008).

From January 1973, he began receiving financial aid from the Spanish Boxing Federation of 45,000 pesetas per month (Cuervo, 2015). It was an important peace of mind that allowed him to devote more time to boxing. With those fixed incomes, he could support his family (Rodríguez Cal, 2015). In addition to that amount, the circumstance of his Olympic triumph began to offer him other possibilities of increasing his income. To be an Olympic champion supposed to be requested to participate in fights that with his presence allowed to fill the auditoriums. Thus, these aspects allowed him to gather other results from his triumph in the Games, in addition to increasing his income (Rodríguez Cal, 2016).

5 CONCLUSIONS

The precarious conditions in the sixties and seventies of the 20th century were the common denominator of Spanish boxers in terms of facilities, materials, opportunities and training. They assumed that the achievement of an Olympic medal was a challenge for the Spanish team, almost unattainable and so it was seen by Jose Enrique Rodriguez Cal. However, we can say that, to great surprise, that milestone was achieved by this Spanish boxer coming from a social environment very economically disadvantaged. His humble beginnings and the precarious conditions in the gymnasiums of the area where he resided, as well as the materials with which he trained, added to the lack of experience from the coaches was a challenge for Enrique. On the other hand was the need to get a job to earn income for his family in his beginnings as an amateur boxer, an aspect that weakened his concentration and performance in boxing.

However, he achieved that achievement very deservedly. His rigor in his training as a disciplined and generous athlete had placed him in the highest sports and personal elite. That triumph marked a milestone in the history of boxing with a bronze medal. That triumph was a milestone for two reasons. First it was the first Olympic medal that the Spanish Olympic boxing achieved and, secondly, it was the sole Olympic medal that Spain obtained in that edition of Munich. This last event meant a greater visibility for boxing in Spain, not only as an Olympic sport, but as a sport that experienced a significant boom throughout the country.

The athletes of that period suffered deficiencies of diverse type, not only in sports level, but in the economic aspects that the practicing of boxing entailed. These conditions marked the withdrawal of amateur boxing from some athletes who could not afford to support themselves with the few income that they could receive to dispute some bouts and they had to share their time as high-performance athletes with a full-time job in order to subsist. That was the circumstance of Enrique Rodríguez Cal, who as in many other cases did not have enough time to prepare properly to reach the level of those supposed to attend an Olympic Games. The medal obtained in Munich, meant for Enrique not only an economic reward on the part of the Spanish Boxing Federation, but also an emerging fame that gave him the possibility of boxing for higher purses. This aspect was decisive for his continuity as an amateur athlete.

However, the athletes who were in the national boxing team in that period could have greater dedication to boxing, because they concentrated for long periods without any expenses and perceived per diems with which to help their families. As Enrique testified, his hope was not to win a medal, he was content to experience what were his first Olympic Games. The precarious socio-cultural and economic level of his environment meant that sport was a unique opportunity for amateur boxers who excelled to have a chance at traveling and getting to know other cities, other cultures and being able to have contact with other social circles. But also, it provided them with a scale of values, a vital orientation that they would not have had a chance to live or experience ever, given the circumstances of their environment and socio-economic upbringing and that today they recognize as definitely positive in their personal development.

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For the undertaking of this article the following oral interviews were performed:
José Enrique Rodríguez Cal. Interview performed in Avilés, Asturias, April 4th 2015.

Agustín Antuña Suárez. Interview performed in Madrid, November 17th 2014.

Antonio Domínguez Gutiérrez, Interview performed in Gijón, Asturia, October 9th 2015.

Furthermore, a group debate was performed with the following participants:

José Enrique Rodríguez Cal, Agustín Antuña Suárez and Antonio Domínguez, October 10th in Avilés, Asturias.

Information for the interviews was used from:

Petit, F. (Interviewer). (2008). Interview to Enrique Rodríguez Cal. Meta and in person, Teleasturias. Available at:

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