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A case of excellence in archive, documents and communication purposes: yesteryears imaginary analysis and enhancement of the memory of the World Champion Felice Gimondi.

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze how a sports fanship can survive after the death of its sports hero. The case of Felice Gimondi, one of the most famous Italian former cycling world champions ought to be taken into consideration because of his heritage and of the co-existence of several physical and digital tools devoted to strengthening his memory.

A museum hall in Almenno San Bartolomeo, a private collection in Bergamo, events, and social networks communities foster Gimondi's heritage, to prevent his remembrance from disappearing from the collective imaginary. According to this, a questionnaire addressed to a snowball sample of 829 respondents, allows this study to outline how Gimondi's memory is still vivid and persistent, expecting to keep it alive through further initiatives. A consequent classification among its fans gives the chance to identify the most desired purposes related to the future of Gimondi's memories. Moreover, this survey underlines how Felice Gimondi forms part of the collective identification of a virtuous sportsman, representing an element of pride and ethics for his fan community, his province of origin, and the entire Italian sportive arena. The paper is enriched by a unique insight into the main realities involved in such processes of enhancing Gimondi's memory.

Keywords : Gimondi, memory, fanship, community, archive.

1. Introduction

The sociological analysis of Felice Gimondi's fanship reveals a cultural phenomenon deeply rooted in the Italian social fabric, particularly in the field of cycling. The fans' passion and devotion towards Gimondi reflects not only admiration for his sporting performances, but also a sense of belonging and collective identity. The figure of Gimondi, in fact, transcends the simple sporting dimension to embody values of humility, tenacity and fair play, which have resonance with the national ethos. His rivalry with Eddy Merckx, for example, was not interpreted only as a sporting competition, but also as a metaphor for the challenge between individualism and teamwork, between innate talent and determination. Furthermore, his ability to remain humble and accessible despite his success helped create an emotional bond with fans, who saw him as a "human" hero and close to their daily experiences. This emotional connection was further strengthened by media narratives and popular representations, which often emphasized his figure as "the people's champion". Memorial activities range from cycling races to cultural events, such as museums and commemorative celebrations that delve into not only his sporting exploits, but also the impact he had on society and sporting culture. Furthermore, his personal story, imbued with dedication and passion, is told in biographies and documentaries that inspire new generations of cyclists. Gimondi's fanship, in particular, actively engages in the promotion of these events, keeping his legacy alive and spreading the values of sport that he embodied so much. Their dedication is also manifested through their participation in events and celebrations, both on the national territory and on online platforms, where historical memorabilia and photographs are often displayed, and the organization of commemorative rides through the streets where Gimondi wrote important pages of his career. These activities not only pay homage to the champion, but also serve as a meeting point for the cycling community, uniting people of all ages in the memory of an athlete who profoundly marked the history of cycling.

This contribution covers the cultural and heroic dimension of the figure of the great cyclist Felice Gimondi (1942 – 2019) in the collective imagination of cycling enthusiasts of the time, to continue with a brief discussion regarding the cultural dimension of the champion's museums and collections, considering how these constitute a relational node in the perspective of the sociology of cultural processes. Books, relics, collections, archives but also memorial activities and institutional dedications stand as elements of the same narrative structure, far from those "simulacra"¹ (Baudrillard, 1981) devoid of social content and meanings; the set of objects and activities linked to the sporting activity and the memory of Gimondi, however, constitute goods and works characterized by an intrinsic, objective (Gimondi) and subjective (the owner or the participating subject) value, functional to the memory and to the relational dynamics of the Bergamo cyclist's fanship.

Through consideration of the most famous museums and archives, memorial activities and works dedicated to Felice Gimondi, and through original analyzes produced by the authors (analysis of newspaper articles, administration of a questionnaire aimed at cycling and Gimondi's history enthusiasts, and analysis of the digital contents - photos and posts in particular - of two Facebook groups), the authors retrace and analyze those excellences and those still active realities that found

¹According to Baudrillard, most objects, consumption and cultural consumption processes in Western societies occur on the basis of a symbolic order of a social nature, related to social position, power, wealth, in which the object itself does not have an intrinsic value, but rather it is characterized on the basis of the individual's social relationships. This system of objects, as reported by the French sociologist, refers to the social status of the individual agent and consumer, and the objects become the elements of communication and distinction within society, losing value and reducing the cultural and relational dimension of individual himself.

the social dimension of the *milieu* of Gimondi fans. Furthermore, considering the relevance that the digital spaces of social media networks have in creating arenas of memory, dialogue and participation, the contribution also aims to interpret the current collective representation of Gimondi and the opinions and behaviors of the current fandom, to the point of outlining the profiling of an ideal fan.

2. Felice Gimondi between cycling, heroism and collective memory

“È passato più di un anno da quel 16 agosto 2019, giorno in cui il grande ciclista Felice Gimondi è venuto a mancare. La sua perdita ha lasciato una profonda ferita tra i bergamaschi a cui Gimondi si è sempre sentito appartenere, come figlio della sua città natale, Sedrina, a cui ha sempre mostrato tanto affetto nonostante i suoi successi in giro per il mondo. Un mito per le vecchie e le nuove generazioni, vincitore di tre Giri d’Italia, di un Tour de France e Vuelta a España: al centro di toccanti e speciali ricordi che in molti hanno voluto raccontare dopo la sua morte.”² (Bergamonews, 14/10/2020).

Gimondi’s exploits, characterized by great sacrifices, dedication and intense training to participate and triumph in national and international competitions, together with the emotion involved (Perissinotto, 2012: 9), were the key elements to build around the image of victorious athlete feelings of passion and identification such as to elevate Gimondi to a hero and to induce a “collective escapism” which translates into “escapism from reality”, making Gimondi an object of worship (Halbwachs, 1997) and of collective mobilization of emotions. Gimondi’s story is a mass narrative told through annals, newspapers, documents and words that dramatize and transform Gimondi’s information and sporting event into a story and a common belief that comes out of historical and social reality to migrate into the “non-empirical beliefs” of the myth (Perissinotto, 2012: 1). Gimondi’s mythical narrative has therefore taken on those characteristics well described in the 1960s by Edgar Morin (2005: 146-148), according to which “the new stars are attracted to both the imaginary and the real [...] The mass press, while he attributes a mythological role to the stars, he immerses himself in their private lives to extract the human essence that allows identification. [...] In this sense, stars are the energetic condensers of mass culture. [...] They are model heroes: they embody the myths of self-realization of private life.”

Cycling and its iconic protagonists, who have aroused intense personal and social passions like the heroes of sport, wars and collective historical memory, have become a true shared epic, a narrative that generates identifications (Marchesini, 2016) and almost religious emotional and votive investments. As Schwartz (2018: 31) highlights, “while history rises «above social groups», memory, both individual and collective, depends on a context” and on events typical of the historical period. In the context of this study, this context coincided with the territory of Bergamo initially and then at a national level in the historical period of the 60s and 70s, strongly characterized by Gimondi’s exploits in sport and by collective recreational and recreational activities, which acted as social tools

² More than a year has passed since August 16, 2019, the day on which the great cyclist Felice Gimondi passed away. His loss has left a deep wound among the people of Bergamo to whom Gimondi has always felt he belonged, as a son of his hometown, Sedrina, to which he has always shown so much affection despite his successes around the world. A myth for the old and new generations, winner of three Giro d’Italia, a Tour de France and Vuelta a España: at the center of touching and special memories that many wanted to tell after his death. [Translated by authors]

of leisure and entertainment, of passion and common interest, leaving an indelible mark in the memory of people and the community.

The relationship between a person's memory and memorial activities is an interdisciplinary field of study that lies at the intersection of sociology, psychology and history. Sociologically, a person's memory is a complex phenomenon that involves both individual and collective memory: individual memory is a personal, subjective experience that is formed through interaction with the social and cultural context in which an individual lives, while collective memory refers to how groups, communities and societies as a whole remember the past and prominent figures, often through rituals, commemorations and monuments, or more generally memorial activities.

Sports memory, in particular, is configured as a multidimensional phenomenon that involves individual and collective memory, contributing to the construction of the social and personal identity of athletes and fans. Georg Simmel (1983) provided a significant contribution with his analysis of the social dynamics intrinsic to sport, considering the implications of competition, interaction and play in the construction of collective and individual memory. Through sport, individuals recall not only their subjective experiences but also significant historical events, which become part of the shared cultural heritage. Sports memory, therefore, is not just an archive of data and statistics, but a living fabric of narratives, emotions and values that are intertwined with the personal history of the athlete and his fans.

Several scholars have explored the theme of the memory of sporting heroes, analyzing how these figures are celebrated and kept alive in the collective memory; among these, Daniele Marchesini (2016) stood out for his work "Eroi dello sport. Storie di atleti, vittorie, sconfitte", which investigates the way in which athletes become cultural symbols and sources of inspiration, influencing national identity and the collective imagination. Luca Bifulco, however, has contributed significantly to the understanding of how sport reflects and influences contemporary social processes, including the creation of myths and the celebration of sporting heroes. Maurice Halbwachs (1968), on the other hand, is a reference name with his theory on the social frameworks of memory, just as Paul Connerton (1989) explored the connections between memory, identity and places, broadening the understanding of memorial dynamics. In terms of publications, "Sociologia delle arti. Musei, memoria e performance digitali" by Anna Lisa Tota and Antonietta De Feo (2020) is a work that investigates the role of museums and the arts in the construction and conservation of collective memory, offering an innovative perspective on memorial practices both museum-based and digital. This text joins a vast literature that includes studies on the communication of memory through the media, the use of digital technologies in the conservation of cultural heritage and artistic performances as vehicles of historical narratives.

While the best-known examples of memorial activities include commemorative ceremonies, monuments or re-enactments, they can also take on more personal and intimate forms, such as memoir writing or private collecting, or other forms of cultural expression, such as creation of archives, exhibitions, dedications or even memorial activities extended to online spaces, with the creation of digital archives, websites and social media campaigns that allow documents, memories and stories to be shared on a global scale and all together serve to honor the past and to shape the present and future collective identity related to the topic of interest.

In particular, the topic of collective memory has gained prominence in the discourse of archival and museology studies in recent decades, with archives and museums frequently characterized as crucial

institutions of social memory, and many professional activities considered forms of memory preservation. Archives and museums conserve and preserve historical documents, relics and all objects and cultural products attributable to an event or a person - and, more generally, to cultural archetypes³ of society and the collective unconscious - safeguarding interpretations, narratives and meanings that people and communities attribute to these, with the aim of remembering and shaping collective perception.

Hero worship refers to the collective admiration and often veneration of individuals who embody qualities such as courage, nobility and strength, which are seen as ideals by society and which, in this specific case, are constantly attributed to the figure of Felice Gimondi. In this sense, archives, museums, collections and memorial activities can be seen as places of negotiation of memory, where different interpretations of the past can coexist and generate dialogue and social participation. Memorial activities are therefore cultural and social events that serve to commemorate events, historical figures or collective experiences that are significant in the present.

The relationship between objects, commemorations and memory, in fact, lies in their materiality and their contemporaneity, in the fact that they are present in time and occupy a specific physical space. Precisely for this characteristic, Baudrillard (1987) attributes to things an anthropological role linked to human finitude, to the extreme limit of existence, whereby objects - and by extension memorial activities - in their duration have the final task of continuing to exist and resist in memory, imprisoning emotions and experiences associated with specific moments of life, objectifying their memory. Conservation, collection and remembrance also intercept both commemoration and the processes of individual and collective identification, also communicating and preserving the biographical memory of the owner. In fact, "this is how what is preserved ends up drawing a sort of autobiography. Like any autobiography, the whole of what we keep is dynamic and retouchable; involves frequently revisited areas and gray areas; it can be aimed at oneself or produce a certain image of oneself among others. And like every memory of the self, it is imbued with affectivity and relationships with others" (Jedlowski, 2010: 68).

The repetition of sportive and mediatic events of cycling, perceived in the collective imagination as a heroic sport (Marchesini, 2016: 77-80), with its suffering, defeats and triumphs, has left an indelible mark of epicness and tragedy in the memory of era, together with the feeling of collective participation in a memorable, emotional and heroic event. This repetition of events and victories elevated Gimondi from athlete to hero, transforming his story as a courageous sportsman into a myth that invites not only fans, but all "members of society itself to participate" (Perissinotto, 2012: 4). If it is important for a society to tell stories to remember and structure collective knowledge and values, it is equally important that exceptional events and figures are transformed into stories in the collective memory, "in order to create that combination of meanings and emotions that arouse initial interest, but which then they become the fundamental ingredient to identify a mythical consistency around a sporting character" (Bifulco, 2014: 44).

³Archetypes, according to Jungian theory (Jung, 1977), are primordial images and psychic models that emerge in literature, art and myths, and the hero is one of the most universal and persistent archetypes.

3. Research methodology and objectives

After a brief list of the main realities inherent to the memorial, commemorative and celebratory activities of Felice Gimondi, the authors focus on some specificities worthy of attention due to their excellence in the work of gathering information, collecting and sharing and dialogue activities and participation, and, subsequently, through sociological analyses, on original aspects derived from investigations carried out by the authors.

The rich presence of original documents and articles in the excellently organized Cav. Ermenegildo Ubiali's Archive, in Ponte San Pietro (BG), near Sedrina (Gimondi's birthplace), allowed the authors to conduct a detailed analysis of the documentary contents through a qualitative hermeneutic approach (Krippendorff, 2018). These contents primarily included public newspaper articles from 1964-1979, as well as personal documents and fan letters from the era featured in the collection. Textual analysis of newspaper articles of the time provided a tool to "explore social reality by inferring the characteristics of a hidden context from the characteristics of an explicit text" (Merten, 1991: 15). This allowed us to extrapolate historical-social information and understand the cultural dynamics (Franzoni, 1987) that influenced the construction of Gimondi's public image. The interaction between sporting events and media coverage has led to the creation of a popular representation (Affuso, 2010) and a mythical narrative (Bifulco, 2014) of the cyclist.

The study of the fan texts of the time was conducted by analyzing the communication units present in the Ubiali Archive, which include approximately 500 letters and documents, 100 postcards and 40 original poems of the time addressed to Gimondi. Using an exploratory and inductive approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), a comparative analysis was carried out with an interpretative grid of the content of texts, words, correspondences and semantic and contextual contents. This allowed us to identify the key themes of the conversations and describe the myths of the collective imagination. In this way, the authors were able to examine fan activities in the 1960s and 1970s, make a typological construction, and derive the construction of a cultural and heroic image of Gimondi. The dimensions of the sporting hero and the activities of Gimondi's fans persist even today, mainly among nostalgic people, who have found new spaces for dialogue on social networks and in cycling re-enactments, and among cycling enthusiasts, both practicing and non-practicing.

The analysis was enriched by a qualitative-quantitative questionnaire (Creswell & Clark, 2017), which was administered to a significant group of users through online groups on Facebook (Bagnini & Russo, 2021) and word of mouth from two relevant witnesses, in the second half of December 2022. To this survey investigation, a netnographic analysis (Kozinets, 2010) of social media content was added, conducted between November 2022 and January 2023 in the same Facebook groups, to examine fandom activities on social media. The term "fandom" is a neologism born from the fusion between fan (short for fanatic) and the suffix -dom (short for kingdom); it indicates a group of people united by the passion for a common phenomenon, character or object. The phenomenon emerged distinctively in the last two decades of the 20th century and spread thanks to the web; being part of a fandom implies a strong knowledge of the object of love, generates collecting and forms of socialization among fans, such as real and virtual communities, gatherings and meetings.

The Facebook groups were selected based on the significance of the name (they had to contain the word "Gimondi") and the number of participants (over a thousand); from this selection, two groups were elected, "Felice Gimondi's Friends", with 5811 users, and "Felice Gimondi - Photos Nostalgie", with 2962 users, as of 7 January 2023. In these two groups the questionnaire was shared from 16

December to 23 December 2023; on the same days it was also shared through word of mouth by two significant witnesses (Norma Gimondi, daughter of Felice Gimondi, and Aurora Sana, daughter of Tino Sana, curator of the Museo del Falegname “Tino Sana”) to contacts selected by them, allowing 829 responses to be collected valid. A brief analysis of the online posts was subsequently carried out in the two groups: for “Felice Gimondi’s Friends” the collection was carried out from 4 to 7 January 2023 and produced 89 posts, and for “Felice Gimondi - Photos Nostalgie” the collection took place in the period 1 November 2022 – 7 January 2023, which allowed 60 posts to be collected.

4. Museums, archives, books, commemorations and memorial activities in honor of Felice Gimondi

Among the main “excellencies” in the structured management of a rich set of memorabilia and documents regarding the career and personal dimension of Felice Gimondi we mention the following realities:

- “Museo del Falegname «Tino Sana»” (www.museotinosana.it), in Almenno San Bartolomeo (BG). “Born in 1987 from the deep passion of the founder Tino Sana for the art of the carpenter’s trade, it is today considered a cultural heritage of the highest profile. From a small conservation space for old tools of the trade to a real museum, where you can find all the shops with their tools: the chair maker, the model maker, the wheelwright, the inlayer, the cooper, the luthier.

The Wood Civilization is also a popular civilization and therefore here you will also find the centuries-old history of regional carts and puppets, the evolution of the bicycle, from the draisine to the bicycles of the trades to those of champions, with the collection of Felice Gimondi” (directly from the Museum website).

In a room specifically dedicated to cycling and Felice Gimondi the following heirlooms are exhibited:

No.	Type of heirloom
10	Bicycles used by Felice Gimondi throughout his career
31	Shirts worn during his competitive career
3	Trophies
3	Set of uniforms: Tokyo 1964 Olympic uniform, Bernocchi Cup uniform and Tokyo 1964 Olympic shirt and accessories.
1	Wooden sculpture by Bruno Chersicla

- “Museo del Ciclismo Madonna del Ghisallo” (www.museodelghisallo.it), in Magreglio (CO). The museum presents itself as a place dedicated to cycling, which celebrates not only men and women who have used and use the bicycle in everyday life and in sporting competitions, but also those who work in the two-wheels sports branch, in particular the competitive one. There are five sections of the Museum, divided into “Great Encyclopedia of Cycling”, “Memorabilia”, “Ciak and champions - 100 films on cycling”, “24 + 24” (by which I mean the 48 cyclists with the best palmares, including Felice Gimondi) and “Man and his means. The design of the racing bicycle”. In its more than 2000 square meters of exhibition space, 2000 memorabilia, 70 official racing bikes and 60 “Maglia Rosa” are collected, inventoried and exhibited.

Inside the museum it is possible to find, in the permanent collection, the following memorabilia related to Felice Gimondi:

Input no.	Type of heirloom	Period of use or creation	Summary description and notes
269	Italy shirt, for rest	1966	Shirt used by Gimondi during the training camp in Tartavalle (CT Magni)
270	GS Bianchi - Faema shirt	1978	GS Bianchi-Faema shirt, the last shirt used by Gimondi in his career
271	Tour de L'Avenir shirt	1964	Jersey of the winner of the final classification of the Tour de l'Avenir
272	Salvarani shirt	1978	Salvarani shirt from the transition to the professionals by Felice Gimondi, 1978
273	Cycling shoes	60s/70s	Cycling shoes used while racing by Felice Gimondi
274	Parchment	1966	Blason d'Oro 1966 - City of Florence
275	Parchment	1966	City of Bergamo Athlete Award - 1965
276	Parchment	1992	Paladina 1992
277	Copy of the cover "Domenica del Corriere"	1965	Passing of the scepter of the King of the Road between Coppi and Gimondi in the yellow jersey
1458	Bianchi - Faema Six Days Shirt	1976	Silk shirt worn by Felice Gimondi at the Sei-Giorni in Milan in 1976, with the nr. 2, paired with Rik Van Linden.
1626	Bianchi Campagnolo track jersey	1977	Pink shirt with white sleeves in Bianchi-Campagnolo silk by Felice Gimondi, winner of the Sei-Giorni di Milano, Velodromo Vigorelli 1977. Initially received within the original metal frame, 60x60 cm. Gift from Mr. Paolo Bernabè (Varedo), in turn received by the chef of the national cycling team, to the donor.

- "Museo del Ciclismo" (www.museociclismo.it), online archive divided into four sections (Cyclists, Races, Teams, Articles and Biographies), full of detailed information and mainly photographic or journalistic documents. Regarding Felice Gimondi, on the site we can find career statistics, six period photographs, three articles, the teams in which he played and his palmares, extremely detailed with all the races and placings obtained during the competitive period.

- "Cav. Ermenegildo Ubiali's Archive", in Ponte San Pietro (BG), which will be treated in more detail as an example of excellence in document management and conservation.

There is also a dedicated editorial which has treated Gimondi's personal and sporting biography in a detailed and rigorous manner; among the works we can list the following books (in alphabetical order):

Author	Title	Publisher, City, Year
Gino Carrara, Renato Fossani	Gimondi racconta	Il conventino, Bergamo, 1979
Bruno Cavalieri	Felice Gimondi. Grinta, rigore e classe	Il Fiorino, Modena, 2019
Luigi Clerici	L'età dei Gimondi. Il ciclismo su strada	Cappelli, Bologna, 1967
Mauro Colombo	Romanzo Giallo. Felice Gimondi e il Tour 1965	Bolis Edizioni, Azzano San Paolo, 2015
Maurizio Evangelista	Felice Gimondi, da me in poi	Mondadori Electa, Milano, 2016
Vittorio Feltri	Ritratti di campioni. Cronache di un giornalista tifoso	Mondadori, Milano, 2020
Paolo Marabini	I miti dello sport. Felice Gimondi	La Gazzetta dello Sport, Milano, 2020
Paolo Marabini	Gimondi, mai così Felice	Minerva Edizioni, Bologna, 2023
Giorgio Martino	Gimondi & Merckx	Kenness Publishing, Milano, 2019
Luciano Pasinetti	Storia di un campione del mondo	Real Locatelli, Almè, 1973
Giacomo Pellizzari	Itinerario Felice	Enrico Damiani Editore, Brescia, 2023
Maurizio Ruggeri	Felice, l'ultimo Tour. Gimondi o l'impossibile sfida	Lìmina, Arezzo, 2006
Ildo Serantoni	Felice Gimondi. La mia vita, la carriera	SEP, Mestre, 2005
Ildo Serantoni	Felice Gimondi. Campione nello sport e nella vita	Bolis Edizioni, Azzano San Paolo, 2020

A short *aperçu* will be dedicated to the work of Ildo Serantoni, particularly detailed and focused on the relationship between Gimondi and his fans.

There are many memorial and commemorative activities, such as re-enactment cycling races, dedicated to Gimondi; in particular, we mention:

- “Gran Fondo Internazionale Felice Gimondi”, from 1996 to 2022; since 2023 it has changed its name to “BGY Airport Gran Fondo” (<https://www.granfondobgy.it>). The BGY Airport Gran Fondo, organized by the GMS company, is an international competition for cycling enthusiasts held in Bergamo in May, embracing some of the most evocative routes and most emblematic climbs in the Bergamo area.

- “Gimondibike”, from 2001 to 2022; since 2023 it has changed its name to “WM (Wheels & Mountains) La Dario Acquaroli” (www.laacquaroli.it). The Gimondibike is an MTB (mountain biking) cycling race that starts from Iseo (BS) and runs along the paths and routes of Franciacorta. Inaugurated as Gimondibike, since 2023 it has carried the name of Dario Acquaroli, the famous international cross-country and mountain biking champion who passed away in 2023.

- “Gran Fondo Il Lombardia Felice Gimondi ENEL” (<https://gfilombardia.it/>), from 2017 to today. Thanks to an agreement between RCS Sports & Events and the Gimondi Family, the competition was dedicated to the winner of the 1966 and 1973 “La Classica delle Foglie Morte”. This race will offer the opportunity to amateur cyclists from all over the world to test themselves on the roads that saw the Lombard champion as the protagonist in his “Giro di Lombardia”.

- “Gimondi Camp” (<https://gimondicamp.it/>), from 2022 to today, organized by the amateur sports association No.Ma.Sport.. The Camp project is intended for children aged between 5 and 12

years old. In homage to the exploits of the famous cyclist, the objectives that the organization sets itself are:

- Bringing children closer to the world of cycling.
- Impart the rules, including those of coexistence, through sporting discipline.
- Educate young cyclists on the rules of the Highway Code.
- Encourage frequent use of the bicycle as a means of urban transport among adolescents attending primary schools.
- Encourage children to use bicycles to go to school, also involving their families in limiting the use of cars for travel.

Among the notable celebratory dedications, we mention (in alphabetical order):

- Asd La Chianina: Long route of “La Chianina Ciclostorica”, 2020 edition, dedicated to Felice Gimondi. La Chianina Ciclostorica is a famous cycling event with racing bikes and vintage clothing organized by the amateur sports association La Chianina in 2014, which brings enthusiasts of the discipline to retrace roads and paths, forgotten over time, in the Tuscan territory.
- Bergamo: Commemorative statue inaugurated in Bergamo in Piazza Dante on 02/09/2023. As reported by Bergamonews.it, this monument is “a wooden sculpture by the artist Emiliano Facchinetti, with the reproduction of a bicycle on whose two wheels the most important victories of Felice Gimondi are engraved on one side and the Bergamo champion himself with his arms raised on the other. All dominated by the five colors of the world champion’s rainbow jersey, the one that Gimondi put on his shoulders on 2 September 1973 at the World Cup in Barcelona.”
- Bianchi: Commemorative bicycle “Nuova Bianchi Oltre XR Gimondi 70 Limited Edition” in 2012, in 70 unique examples all numbered on the occasion of Felice Gimondi’s birthday.
- Mountain community of Val Brembana, in collaboration with the Province of Bergamo: “Val Brembana cycle path”, inaugurated on 10/20/2007.
- Elio e le storie tese (musical group): “Sono Felice”, song from the album “Esco dal mio corpo e ho molta paura (Gli inediti 1979-1986)”, released on 29/11/1993.
- Enrico Ruggeri (musician): “Gimondi e il Cannibale”, song from the album “L’uomo che vola”, released on 05/26/2000.
- Diano Marina (IM): Commemorative bust installed at the Belvedere on Capo Berta, dedicated to the Italian cycling champions, inaugurated on 08/08/2020. We note the presence of three other busts, dedicated to Gino Bartali, Fausto Coppi and Costante Girardengo.
- Ita Airways: A320-216 aircraft, dedicated on 11/13/2022 and bearing the name of Felice Gimondi on the cockpit.

Finally, we would like to point out that amateur collecting and the dissemination of sports content via social media networks are very present. In particular, the two Facebook groups “Felice Gimondi’s Friends” and “Felice Gimondi – Photos Nostalgie” are mentioned for the richness of their contents and the notable number of participants.

4.1 Cav. Ermenegildo Ubiali’s Archive

Cav. Ermenegildo Ubiali's Archive is a private collection of memorabilia related to Italian contemporary history, Lombardy's traditions, and the history of cycling. Based in Ponte San Pietro (BG), this archive grew especially during the 60s and 70s, when Ermenegildo (1936-2011) began a friendship and a collaboration with the uprising champion Felice Gimondi. More specifically, he helped the abovementioned cyclist in structuring his international press archive from the beginning to the end of his professional career (1964-1979). Being a cycling enthusiast, Ermenegildo received as presents from Gimondi's side all the official sport uniforms, some bikes, trophies, pictures, and memorabilia. All those objects have been cataloged and organized scientifically, available for further studies or publications. Moreover, Ermenegildo managed the correspondence between the champion and his fans, again arranging them for further consultations. According to this, in 2010, Ermenegildo organized his last exposition of Gimondi's memorabilia in Ponte San Pietro's Pinacotheca⁴, with the presence of his friend Felice and of that time local authorities. After the passing of Ermenegildo, the collection has been managed by his relatives, authorizing press services and academic studies on his archive.

Up to now, Cav. Ermenegildo Ubiali's Archive is the most extensive private collection structurally organized, available for any academic purpose to enhance his memories⁵. Because of Ermenegildo's social merits, Ponte San Pietro's local administration dedicated a public garden to Cav. Ermenegildo Ubiali in 2016.

Talking about the Archive's section devoted to 60s and 70s' cycling (especially about Felice Gimondi) this collection includes about:

No.	Type of heirloom
500	Letters and documents about Felice Gimondi
200	Photographs of various formats
300	Postcards
40	Poems
2	Bicycles ridden by Gimondi in official races (Chiorda and Bianchi)
15	Sports uniforms
40	Objects/memorabilia (models/ bottles/ athletic cards/ contemplative medals)
6	Trophies and awards
3000	Newspaper articles of national and international press review (1964- 1979)
700	Letters and correspondence with fans

According to Ermenegildo's family, this archive will be freely available for academic purposes or publications devoted to strengthening Ermenegildo's values of altruism and friendship: giving the future to the memory has been one of his main goals and his Family intends to proceed coherently in this direction.

4.2 Ildo Serantoni, "Felice Gimondi, la mia vita, la carriera"

⁴https://www.ecodibergamo.it/stories/cultura-e-spettacoli/129855_gimondi_felice__di_correre_la_mostra/

⁵ Acknowledgement: a special mention to Dr. Matteo Macoli that strongly supported and helped Ermenegildo Ubiali in organizing and classifying the archive section devoted to cycling and Felice Gimondi's correspondence.

Ildo Serantoni's book entitled "Felice Gimondi, la mia vita, la carriera" (translated: "Felice Gimondi, my life, the career") is the milestone of the Italian cyclist's biography. Written in the early years of the new millennium, it was published in 2005, SEP Editor. Those 208 pages include biographical aspects of the World Champion, with direct witnesses by Felice's friends and collaborators. Many high-resolution pictures characterize each page, including also scanned letters and documents celebrating Gimondi's athletic success. Moreover, thanks to the direct involvement of Felice, many pages are dedicated to his private life and his family with many anecdotes. This book also included the most recent times of Felice's activism in cycling, especially the presidency of Marco Pantani's team "Mercatone Uno" (2000). Because of the extension and the quality of this book, Serantoni's text can be identified as the most complete one, supervised directly by the protagonist. This is a detailed biography, written by the journalistic expertise of the author.

In Serantoni's book, in particular, the reader could find elements that characterize the popular enthusiasm of the time and various forms of exhilarating internalization of the myth, to the point of dedicating poems, illustrations and music to it, as well as transcriptions of school themes, assigned by the teachers of the time to their students in a perspective of hypothetical dialogue with the Champion.

5. The "past": collective imaginary of Felice Gimondi in the archive of E. Ubiali

5.1 Analysis of newspaper articles of the period 1964 -1979

The combination between the career of Felice Gimondi and his fans has its origins in his own biography, accompanied by the media coverage given by yesterday's press (around 20,000 newspaper articles) and, again, today mainly through videos visible from archives Rai and online platforms such as YouTube. Since the beginning of his career, press, radio and television publications have fueled a celebratory-sporting reading, whose chronicle narration of events quickly crystallized races and victories in an aura that consolidated its mythical aspect.

Starting from family origins, the dimension of the "popular champion" from a small town in Val Brembana, Sedrina, was immediately described. The media coverage saw, however, an exploit that transposed Gimondi from a provincial dimension to a supranational dimension, an event that can identify the origin of the myth: the promising victory of the Tour de l'Avenir in 1964 led Tuttosport on 21 July to the title "Felice Gimondi, nome da ricordare" ["Felice Gimondi, a name to remember"]. Exactly one year later, and unexpectedly against all predictions at the time, a noticeably young Gimondi won the Tour de France in July 1965. This victory consecrated Gimondi in the Olympus of the great Italian runners to the point that La Domenica del Corriere of 25 July 1965 offered an epic depiction of the late Fausto Coppi who figuratively passes the baton to Felice telling him "Vai! Adesso tocca a te!" ["Go! Now it is up to you!"]. Even the South China Morning Post of July 15 explicitly talked about "Giovane ciclista italiano che fa la storia del Tour" ["Young Italian cyclist making Tour history"]. Already from the victory of 1965, we were witnessing the narration going beyond the celebratory chronicle dynamics, to return to a courageous evocative parallelism with the great figures of the national cycling past.

In 1966 there was a second epic victory, the Paris-Roubaix: here the newspapers operate with a view to consolidating the myth. E.g., Stadio of 18 April 1966 headlined "Un'impresa da supercampione

che non merita accostamenti col passato [...]: ci ha trasformato in paradiso l’inferno del nord” [“A feat of a super champion that does not deserve comparisons with the past (...): the hell of the north has transformed us into paradise”]. On the same date, L’Equipe relaunched the parallelism with the “Campionissimo” in French: “Gimondi come Coppi”. Substantially all the victories of the “Classics” followed, pigeonholing multiple successes also in the Grand Tours, in particular those of 1967 and 1969, which consolidated the cyclist from Bergamo in the iconography of the Maglia Rosa. Corriere dello Sport, on 13 June 1976, resumed the comparison with the past, also adding the imagery of another memorable Tuscan sportsman: “Gimondi, come Coppi, come Bartali, nella leggenda” [“Gimondi, like Coppi, like Bartali, in the legend”].

Related articles, more aimed at the “Gimondi person”, are concentrated between 1978/1979 for his end-of-career leave and 2019, the date of his death. Even in these cases, the terms with which the headlines and articles were written go beyond mere sports news to once again venture comparisons to the giants of cycling, almost as if to legitimize the construction of the myth.

5.2 Analysis of yesteryear fans’ letters

Analysis and interpretation were directed towards the development of a descriptive typology of the main themes that recur in the correspondence and documents of Ubiali’s archive, and subsequently, towards the creation of a first ideal typology of fans of the time. To achieve this objective, the authors relied on data and recurring significant elements, identified through a common interpretative grid, analyzing words, correspondences and semantic and contextual contents through a conventional, exploratory and inductive approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). From a first examination, several types of letters emerge; in particular, the total is 248 contents (87% from Italian fans, 13% from foreign fans) and in these we can see a typification distributed as follows:

No.	Type of letter
68	Request for autographs
83	Celebration of the myth
16	Request for sports advice
26	Sports outbursts and comments
30	Greeting and compliment postcards
8	Small gadgets
17	Farewell and farewell for the end of career

By means of semantic and statistical analysis (Rositi, 1988), and lexicometric analysis (Bailey, 2006) of the letters, and despite the limitations of the current exploratory study and the absence of watertight compartments in the characterization of the fans’ letters, we have outlined an ideal categorization of the contents and fans of the time into celebratory, commemorative and residual.

The celebratory fan expresses a compliment or a sense of pride deriving from the pleasure of addressing their reference champion. In this category there are postcards or requests for autographs or memorabilia; these letters increase numerically near the victories during the Tours or Championships.

The commemorative fan is characterized by a lively celebratory spirit, strengthened by a sense of belonging to the local context or to the world of cycling, in a perspective of idealization of the sporting

myth. From the respondents' point of view, in some cases there is a kind of "popular devotionism" aimed at the sporting myth, with the most enthusiastic and meaningful letters.

The residual fan includes two subcategories, determined by his origin or the way the person relates to the sporting hero. The fan outside the cycling world seeks synergies with Gimondi and, more generally, with the sporting legend, sharing their firsthand experiences. The fan motivated by a personal interest in cycling includes the elements of the generalist fan, adding a self-presentation and a celebration of cycling, giving the message a personal meaning.

6. The "present": memory and presence of Felice Gimondi in online communities

6.1 Profiling the fans of the present

The questionnaire was distributed at the end of autumn 2022 through the Facebook groups "Felice Gimondi's Friends" and "Felice Gimondi - Photos Nostalgie", as well as through personal contacts of two significant witnesses. This distribution generated 829 valid responses, with an average age of 58 y.: 13% are women with an average age of 52 y. and 86% are men with an average age of 59 y.; 1% do not identify with a gender. As regards the territorial distribution, 96% are Italian, of which 40% reside in Lombardy: of these, half (169 people, 20.4% of the total) resides in the province of Bergamo.

An interesting fact concerns the favorite cyclist: although the title of the questionnaire was "The Myth of Felice Gimondi", the cyclist who received the highest number of preferences, 43%, was Marco Pantani, compared to 31.4% of preferences obtained by Gimondi. The 81% of people interviewed have a brief knowledge of the history of Italian cycling and 91% have a general knowledge of Felice Gimondi's career. As regards the opinions on Felice Gimondi, for the majority of those interviewed the athlete represents various aspects, not just sporting ones. For 90% Gimondi represents honesty and respect for the values of sport (ethical dimension), and for 88% he represents traditional Italian values (cultural dimension). For 85% of people, Gimondi is still a mythical hero and a symbol of Bergamo and local culture. For 28% of respondents, the image of Gimondi as an athlete evokes the Grand Tours of cycling and for 18% it brings back the epic duels with the "Cannibal" Eddy Merckx. If they had the opportunity to meet Gimondi, 76% would like information and to meet the Champion, while 42% would like to receive autographs, commemorative photos, objects and memorabilia.

The main activity carried out online and on social media by the interviewees is the informative and documentary research, focused on contents relating to the cycling races of the time and Gimondi's activities. The purchase and collection of goods and memorabilia are typical activities of a small group of enthusiasts, motivated by admiration for the heroic figure of Gimondi. As regards the social aspect of Gimondi's fandom, 73% of those interviewed are part of Facebook communities dedicated to Gimondi and a further 5% are part of cycling communities not specifically dedicated to Gimondi, for a total of 645 respondents. As often happens on social media, the majority of users enjoy the contents of their interest passively; just over half of users actively search for photos, videos and historical documents on social media and forums. Even fewer people (41%) share personal content, photos and videos of cycling and Gimondi. About a quarter of the people interviewed organize and practice cycling together with others, demonstrating how cycling is a sport practiced in groups, in which experiences and efforts are shared. To the question "What does Felice Gimondi represent for

you personally?” 75% of those interviewed responded - 623 people - expressing a personal opinion on Gimondi’s image and what the sample represents for them. The analysis of the comments highlighted the presence of three types of fan comments which, in part, show characteristic behavioral attitudes partially attributable to the previous classification of Gimondi’s fans.

Percentage	Type of comment
43%	Articulated and intersectional comments - ethical, sporting, affective
31%	Celebratory comments
24%	Commemorative comments

The first set of comments was classified as “intersectional” (Crenshaw, 2017) as it presents reflections, opinions, or narratives of events or attributions that are not easily interpreted in a linear manner, but rather through the lens of the individual subjectivity of the respondents. The largest subgroup expresses an ethical connotation, in which Gimondi is praised for his values, mainly tenacity, humility, seriousness, dedication, honesty. The other two subgroups are the sporting one, linked to the dimension of memory of Gimondi’s sporting events, and the affective one, in which the respondent evokes feelings and memories through the figure of Gimondi.

Celebratory fans comment account for nearly 31%; of these, half expresses praise and celebrations (e.g., 25 people write “champion” or “great champion”), often associating them with the values that Gimondi evokes in the person. Finally, commemorative fans constitute almost 24% and their comments aim to underline the historical, heroic and mythical aspect of Gimondi, with the aim of keeping the memory alive and strengthening the legend according to the characteristics of the “reputational entrepreneur” of the memory (Fine, 1996).

6.2 Analysis of social media activities of fans

Collective discussions in the two Facebook groups we considered are numerically limited, with modest and short-lived participation, as suggested by studies on superficial and illusory sociability in social networks (Marcucci & Boscaro, 2004). Most of these discussions are initiated by group administrators or moderators and the topics mainly concern short commemorative cycling races organized by enthusiasts, administrators or by Norma Gimondi, the champion’s daughter. The contents of the online posts are historical-biographical of past cycling events, with Gimondi as protagonist, and commemorative-celebratory of the mythical image of Gimondi, of social occasions and commemorative events, such as the “Gran Fondo Felice Gimondi”.

The “Felice Gimondi’s Friends” group is the most popular (almost six thousand users) and active: from 4 to 7 January 2023, 89 posts were produced. Of these, 68 were produced by administrators and moderators; the posts promoted by users are numerically lower, but not scarce, since we can count 16 posts in 4 days; 5 posts were not significant. If “history makes the past an object of analysis, commemoration makes it an object of commitment” (Schwartz, 2018: 34), it is easy to reconsider how a greater participation is a responsibility of those who manage and promote such groups and activities. The most frequently shared contents are historical-biographical photos (34) and photos of dedicated events and celebrations with Felice Gimondi as protagonist (21), both during sporting activities and afterwards, also on public and sporting occasions of national importance (18). The

photos of Gimondi as a cyclist, especially in his exploits during the races of Giro d'Italia or in the photos representing the constant duel with Eddy Merckx, aroused particular interest among users.

The “Felice Gimondi - Photos Nostalgie” group numbers half the size of the previous one (just under 3000 users) and sees participation exclusively from users, with a rather low frequency of sharing: the digital analysis has in fact extended to the period from November 1, 2022, to January 7, 2023, to get 60 user-generated contents. Even in this group, the most shared contents are the historical-biographical photos of cycling events with the presence of Gimondi (36); as many as 27 (out of 60) were shared by non-Italian users (in particular Dutch, Belgian and French), with many photos portraying the Paris-Roubaix, the Ronde van Vlaanderen (Tour of Flanders), the Tour de France and the epic challenges with Eddy Merckx.

Assuming – considering the exploratory nature of this study – a typological description of the ideal profiles of contemporary fans on social media, through the previous hermeneutic insights, we can identify the characteristics of three types of fans. The residual fan is definitely the most present, not incredibly involved in the collective discourse and limited to sporadic appreciations. The moderately active sports fan is interested in sharing or seeing images and posts of sporting exploits in order to remember victories, struggles, efforts or famous sections of the itineraries travelled by professionals and retraced through imitation and passion by amateurs. The celebratory and commemorative fan, who could be defined as a “memory entrepreneur” (Lang & Lang, 1990), is the least numerically present but also strongly interested in keeping the memory alive and therefore he is the most active in the communities - and not only on social media - in the promotion of myths and activities, of cycling commemorations or social occasions. The most active fandom, in particular, is characterized by greater internal homogeneity and forms of activism and commitment (Hebdige, 1979) which are found in historical information and documentation activities, collecting (newspapers and memorabilia) and participation in celebratory events or reminiscent.

7. Conclusions

What emerges from the management of Felice Gimondi's memory is the spontaneous coexistence of many collections and initiatives devoted to strengthening its consolidation. More specifically, the Museo del Falegname “Tino Sana” and Museo del Ciclismo Madonna del Ghisallo represent the most prominent collection, open to the public. Contemporarily, Cav. Ermenegildo Ubiali's Archive represents a unique niche, because of the presence of official memorabilia, and an excellent classification of the press release and the correspondence with Gimondi's fans. This private archive can be consulted only for academically justified purposes or in public initiatives approved by Ubiali's family.

In parallel, the future of the Felice Gimondi's memory is guaranteed by the champion's family, sponsoring sporting events, organizing exhibitions or “summer camps” to enhance the values embraced by cycling. Contemporarily, many other private figures still exist, in some cases as private memorabilia collectors: exceedingly difficult to identify in a structured way. Nonetheless, the mass media coverage dedicated to Gimondi still plays a key role in strengthening his memory.

Answering to the spirit of the time and to a nostalgic desire, new books are periodically published, celebrating Felice's heritage and career. In many cases, the dematerialization of pictures and archives shifted towards a digital perspective: not only paper books, but also eBooks and online archives.

The coexistence of sports enthusiasts and aged fans paved the way for the spread of social network thematic groups. This reinforced a faster and wider range perspective on the desire to catalyze Gimondi in the contemporary collective sports imaginary. As last remark, the territorial recognition of Gimondi as an excellence of Bergamo's Province allowed local administrators to remark on the relationship between the geographical and social context and his most awarded cyclist.

In conclusion, the spontaneous and heterogeneous presence of all the above-mentioned aspects depicts how structured and spontaneous initiatives can relaunch the memory of a sport icon to the future. The hope and the pledge are that further coordination among such initiatives could be even more synergic, fostering the heritage of the Bergamo Province as a land of sports heroes, still supported by past and present fans. Gimondi can be a milestone in such a virtuous cycle, also thanks to the excellent testimonies that exist in different forms and contexts.

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