



HAL
open science

Unsung Women Federal Leaders within the Labour Sport Federation in France, from its Establishment to the Second Post-War Period

Yannick Deschamps

► **To cite this version:**

Yannick Deschamps. Unsung Women Federal Leaders within the Labour Sport Federation in France, from its Establishment to the Second Post-War Period. *Histories of Women's Work in Global Sport: A Man's World?*, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 127-159, 2019, 978-3-030-26909-8. 10.1007/978-3-030-26909-8_6 . halshs-03434886

HAL Id: halshs-03434886

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03434886>

Submitted on 18 Nov 2021

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Unsung Women Federal Leaders within the Labour Sport Federation in France, from its Establishment to the Second Post-War Period

Yannick Deschamps

Chapitre d'ouvrage tiré de : Georgia Cervin et Claire Nicolas (dir.), *Histories of Women's Work in Global Sport: A Man's World?*, Basingstoke (Royaume-Uni) : Palgrave Macmillan, coll. Palgrave Studies in Sport and Politics, 2019.

Among leaders who had a visible role – from a historical perspective – in the establishment and development of the *Fédération Sportive et Gymnique du Travail* (FSGT), a labour sport federation established in France in December 1934, there were mainly men. René Rousseau, Auguste Delaune, Robert Mension, Georges Marrane – this enumeration of French labour sports leaders could be extended again and again without hearing the names of women leaders, implying that women were kept out of positions of responsibility. However, this impression cannot be confirmed or reversed because little is known about federal labour sports leadership.

The leadership of the FSGT has been observed in the light of major and key decisions taken about the management of labour sport or through its political guidance and its ideological tendencies. But its own composition and organization have never been directly studied. Relying mainly on official writings and speeches whose contents were dominated by the masculine gender,¹ this approach only highlighted male executives who embodied these

¹ June Purvis, “Using Primary Sources When Researching Women’s History from a Feminist

Perspective,” *Women’s History Review* 1, no. 2 (1992): 279. The author notes the need to go beyond official documents to observe the real role of women in history.

power issues, while most of the federal leaders, with powers and responsibilities more discreet but just as essential to the functioning of the Federation, became historical actors increasingly anonymous and silent over the decades.

The FSGT was set up following the merger of two workers' sports federations: on the one hand the *Fédération Sportive du Travail* (FST) and on the other hand the *Union des Sociétés Sportives et Gymniques du Travail* (USSGT). The former joined the Red International Sport (Sportintern) in the summer of 1923 and thus claimed its proximity to the communist movement. This ideological orientation led to the split of the Federation and to the creation of the USSGT three years later, funded under the initiative of minority leaders. Close to socialist organizations, the USSGT integrated the Socialist Workers' Sport International. Although these two French workers' sports federations were gender mixed organizations, women's presence within federal leadership was very rare and irregular. On the FST side, Suzanne Pignard,² Henriette Royer,³ and Andrée Barbé⁴ had briefly held some federal responsibilities in the 1920s, and then, Rose Guérard⁵ integrated the federal leadership in a

² *L'Humanité*, July 24, 1923. She entered into the Conseil Fédéral for few months just after the Federation became a national section of the Sportintern.

³ *L'Humanité*, September 13, 1927. She was a member of the Conseil Fédéral for a short period.

⁴ *L'Humanité*, November 29, 1927. She obtained a federal position in 1927, just after the resignation of several leaders. The following year, she was appointed delegate of the FST at the Sportintern Congress, where she was the only woman among the 39 participants. André Gounot explained very few women took part in International Congresses of Red Sport during the twenties: *Die Rote Sportinternationale, 1921–1937. Kommunistische Massenpolitik im europäischen Arbeitersport* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2002), 137.

⁵ The militant trajectory of Rose Guérard was first studied by Fabien Sabatier, who also notes a part of leader experiences of this sportswoman in the labour sport movement at different scales. Fabien Sabatier, "Rose Guérard, militante du mouvement sportif ouvrier. Itinéraire d'une femme dans

more sustainable way. On the USSGT side, the number of women with federal responsibilities was even fewer than in the Red Sport organization, since only Ms Morant and Ms Bourjès were listed amongst federal leaders.⁶ If women were not totally absent from the federal leaderships of the workers' sports organizations, only very few held responsibilities in these federations which remained highly dominated by male influences.

The weak presence of women in federal bodies of these sport organizations reflects the paternalistic model of society that was reaffirmed in France, and more broadly in Europe, after the First World War. If the war was an important moment in the emancipation of women, because they had to assume greater responsibilities to replace soldiers who had gone to the front lines, the end of the conflict opened a period of re-establishment of male authority in all areas of society.⁷ This male dominance also existed in French socialist and communist movements, in which women were extremely few and, with rare exceptions, without responsibilities.⁸ If the issue of emancipation was sometimes mobilized in the 1920s in

un monde d'hommes (1923–1945),” In Thierry Terret (ed.), *Sport et Genre, Tome 1. La conquête d'une citadelle masculine*. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005).

⁶ *Le Populaire*, March 28, 1927; May 26, 1927. Ms. Morant, widow of Julien Morant, a sports leader who had made a significant contribution to the development of workers' sport in the Paris region, was a member of the Commission Administrative, alongside Ms. Bourjès, before briefly becoming assistant secretary of the Federation and head of the Commission for women's sports.

⁷ Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Post-war France, 1917–1927*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994); Anne-Marie Sohn, “Chronologie et dialectique entre féminin et masculin (XIX^e–XX^e siècles),” In Luc Capdevila, Sophie Cassagnes, Martine Cocaud (eds.), *Le Genre face aux mutations. Masculin et féminin du Moyen Age à nos jours*. (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2003): 15–29.

⁸ Claude Pannetier, Bernard Pudal, “La part des femmes, des femmes à part...,” In Claude Pannetier, Bernard Pudal (eds.), *Le sujet communiste. Identités militantes et laboratoires du « moi »*.

socialist and communist discourses, it was more for the purpose of attracting new women militants than to really give them more responsibilities. The men's conquest of powerful positions was also present in the field of sport, even within workers' sport organizations, which did not encourage the integration of sportswomen into federal leadership.

At the congress of French workers' sport in December 1934, during which the latest issues of the implementation of the FSGT were debated, the question of women's roles in the management and the organization of the Federation was raised. It was clearly proposed that "women should be trained in the work of the organization and its direction".⁹ Thus, integration of women into the federal leadership became one of the challenges for labour sport in its early years, though these were partly disrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War. How had this awareness of the need to entrust some federal responsibilities to sportswomen been cemented in the facts? Had it facilitated the establishment of a progressive policy of opening access to responsibilities for sportswomen, or was it a more informal process? To understand the role of women in the leadership of the FSGT, all leader positions must be taken into account, from the most central to the least visible.

Chaired by Georges Marrane and Antonin Poggioli until 1939, the federation was headed by the *Bureau Fédéral*, composed of the *Commission Exécutive*, the most central federal body, and several complementary commissions¹⁰. The variety of federal functions and

(Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2014):165–189; Helmut Gruber, "French Women in the Crossfire of Class, Sex, Maternity and Citizenship," In Helmut Gruber and Pamela Graves (eds.), *Women and Socialism, Socialism and Women. Europe between the Two World Wars*. (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998): 279–320.

⁹ *Le Populaire*, December 25, 1934. Translated by the author.

¹⁰ In the first Bureau Fédéral there were Commission Exécutive, Finance Commission, Control Commission, Conflicts Commission, Commission for the Press, Commission for Education and

the hierarchy of the leaders' powers leads to another set of questions. Which federal positions did women have the opportunity to occupy? Did they have access to all responsibilities, or did they face a partial opening, limited to some secondary functions? Who were the women interested in getting responsibilities, and which were the favourable vectors to their recruitment within the federal leadership?

Conducting research focused on women's access to responsibilities in sport has several specific ambitions that contribute to the writing of gender history. Firstly, it goes beyond biographical analysis of the greatest women sport personalities, which were necessary to show that women had played an important role in sport history, but which also reinforced the idea of the exceptional nature of these trajectories and ignored the different forms of women's involvement in sports' organization.¹¹ Secondly, it avoids considering the marginalization of women from powerful positions in sport as a self-evident fact during the interwar period, and so it allows greater attention to the specificities, frameworks, conditions and, of course, the limits of sportswomen's exercise of responsibilities. Thirdly, by revealing places where women attained responsibilities within sports organizations, it becomes possible to examine the more general evolution of the place of women in society, sport being a cultural phenomenon often considered as a reflection of the characteristics of society.

Propaganda, Organization Commission and Bureau Sportif Fédéral. Alongside the Bureau Fédéral, there were also several Sport Commissions managing each sport discipline, but due to a lack of sources and information it was not possible to investigate the leaders of these different bodies.

¹¹ Helen Lenskyj, *Women, Sport and Physical Activity: Research and Bibliography* (Ottawa: Minister of State, Fitness, and Amateur Sport, 1988): 36; Catherine Louveau, "Inégalité sur la ligne de départ : femmes, origines sociales et conquête du sport," *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés*, no. 23 (2006): 119–43.

The identity of women who attained leadership positions was found by cross-referencing the archives of the FSGT,¹² in the Journal of Sessions of the Bureau Fédéral, with national daily newspapers such as *L'Humanité*, close to the French Communist Party, and *Le Populaire*, close to the Socialist movement, which after the National Congress published annually the names of sports leaders appointed in each federal commission. These newspapers, associated with *Sport*, FSGT's official weekly magazine, were also used to find factual information about trajectories of women leaders and their process of integration into the federal leadership. Recognizing that among women leaders in the FSGT some were close to the communist movement and that militants were generally registered by the General Intelligence, I decided to visit the archives of the Police Prefecture of Paris, where personal files are kept.¹³ These files allowed me to get original and useful documents to accurately trace militants' involvement, leaders' careers, and sometimes personal information about women sport leaders.¹⁴

The analysis of the place of women in the leadership of the French labour sport federation between its establishment and the post-Second World War period is carried out in three steps. The first step assesses the extent of women's integration and observes the kind of responsibilities they held, by studying first the leadership trajectory of Rose Guérard, who had a more central role in the FSGT, and then the sport leadership careers of other women who

¹² Archives of the FSGT are searchable in the Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail (Funds 2009–015), in Roubaix.

¹³ Archives of the Police Prefecture of Paris (APPP): 1W – Cabinet the Police Prefet; 77W – General Intelligence.

¹⁴ These countless personal files made by the General Intelligence constitute a relevant documentary set for the Microhistory and to lead prosopographical approaches to researching militants or leaders within the communist movement.

obtained some federal responsibilities in the second half of the 1930s. As a second step, particular attention will be given to the profile of women leaders, both in terms of previous sport leadership experiences at different levels and in their personal or social situations, in order to explain the origins of their involvement and the factors favourable to their integration in the federal leadership. The last step will be to focus on the impact of the Second World War on the evolution of women leaders' trajectories until the Liberation, between those who retired from their federal functions, and those who acquired new opportunities within the leadership of the FSGT in the post-war period.

The integration of women in the federal leadership of the Labour Sport Federation

At the end of the Merger Congress in December 1934, a unified leadership was chosen to manage the FSGT, including both former members of the FST and former members of the USSGT in order to maintain the best balance between socialist and communist influences. Among all these federal leaders, there were a few women: Rose Guérard and Valentine Signeux from the FST, Lucienne Kling (or Klein) and Gisèle Balay from the USSGT.¹⁵ In December 1935, during the 1st Federal Congress, another woman leader joined them, Denise Briday, who was formerly a member of the FST.¹⁶ To figure out the extent of this integration of women leaders from the establishment of the FSGT to the eve of the Second World War, it is necessary to understand qualitative and quantitative aspects of the federal positions entrusted to them.

Rose Guérard, a woman leader with various federal positions

Rose Guérard, a young sportswoman born in 1908 in Paris, entered into a club affiliated to the

¹⁵ *Le Populaire*, December 28, 1934.

¹⁶ *Le Populaire*, December 31, 1935.

FST in Montreuil in the mid-1920s, before getting an important role in the creation and the development of the FSGT in the mid-1930s. In the context of the rise of fascism in Europe and violent events led by the far-right movements in Paris on February 6, 1934, she was convinced of the need to unify the French workers' sports organizations in order to build a united front of action. Thus, she regularly gave her support to several sport meetings between USSGT-clubs and FST-clubs, which allowed the initiation of the rapprochement between the Communist Sports Federation and the Socialist Sports Federation.¹⁷ Unlike her, most leaders of the FST preferred, in the beginning, to believe these meetings took place because socialist sportsmen wanted to join Red sport and the Revolutionary agenda.¹⁸ Until the summer of 1934, she did not hesitate to promote the International Sporting Event Against Fascism and War, which brought together USSGT and FST members, alongside no fewer than 3,000 foreign worker sportsmen, in August at the Pershing Stadium in Paris.¹⁹

Two months later, following several discussions and negotiations, the leaders of the FST and the USSGT agreed to set up a Joint Commission in order to prepare the merger of their Federations. Owing to her heavy involvement in the unification of the French workers' sports movement, Rose Guérard was appointed as secretary of the Joint Commission to represent the FST. This function, shared with Alfred Lallement, a member of the USSGT and

¹⁷ *L'Humanité*, March 19, 1934.

¹⁸ André Gounot, *Les mouvements sportifs ouvriers en Europe (1893–1939). Dimensions transnationales et déclinaisons locales.* (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2016): 172.

¹⁹ André Gounot, “Le rassemblement international des sportifs contre le fascisme et la guerre : Paris 1934”, In Pierre Arnaud et Alfred Wahl (eds.), *Sports et relations internationales. Actes du colloque de Metz-Verdun septembre 1993.* (Metz : Centre de Recherche Histoire et Civilisation de l'Université, 1994): 157–72.

the secretary of the *Union Sportive Ouvrière* of Malakoff, allowed her to contribute to the writing of the Charter of Unity.²⁰ Both workers' sports Federations validated this Charter, and the FSGT was definitively voted for at the Merger Congress. Guérard directly worked on the establishment of this federation, before getting a prominent position in the leadership of this Federation. At the end of the Merger Congress, all members of the first Bureau Fédéral of the labour sports Federation were chosen. Guérard obtained a place on the Commission Exécutive, becoming the only woman among the 16 members elected.²¹ She was then reappointed to this function at each Federal Congress for four years,²² and she remained the only woman to have the chance to take part in the most important discussions and decisions concerning the management or the organization of the Federation. From her role in the preparation of the rapprochement of workers' sports Federations to her participation in the Commission Exécutive of the FSGT, Guérard was responsible for key functions. In addition to these responsibilities, she was also a member of different specific federal commissions, which illustrates her broad involvement in the leadership bodies of the labour sport Federation.

In December 1934, she was integrated to the federal commission for press,²³ a field in which she had acquired extensive experience since the early 1930s. First, she was employed in the administration of *L'Avant-garde*, the newspaper of the *Jeunesses Communistes* created

²⁰ *L'Humanité*, November 19, 1934.

²¹ *L'Humanité*, December 25, 1934.

²² Archives of the *FSGT*, 2009-015-002: Journal of Sessions: December 30, 1935; December 26–7, 1936; December 19, 1937.

²³ *Le Populaire*, December 28, 1934.

in 1920, for a few months in 1931.²⁴ Then, two years later, she contributed to the launching of *Sport*, the weekly FST newspaper where she was a member of the Editorial Board.²⁵ She considered it as “a fighting weapon of the worker sportsmen”,²⁶ and as an essential tool to ensure the propaganda of workers’ sports. If most of the published articles talked about the activities of the FST, she regularly insisted that this sports newspaper was not restricted only to Red Sport, but was open to all worker sportsmen, especially those of the USSGT. This unifying tone allowed *Sport* to continue after the merger of both French workers’ sports federations, becoming the official newspaper of the FSGT. As a member of the federal commission for press, Guérard had to ensure links between *Sport* and the labour sport movement, and she was also responsible for media monitoring of various labour sports events. Beyond the press, Guérard also became a member of the federal commission for education and propaganda,²⁷ through which she was responsible for defining results and prospects of federal propaganda work. Knowledgeable about propaganda issues, she gave propaganda lessons to the members of the FSGT and she presented what were aims and means of the propaganda conducted within the Federation.²⁸ At the first *Congrès Fédéral*, in December 1935, press and propaganda commissions were gathered in the same body, and she kept these responsibilities. In addition to her many activities in the federal leadership, Guérard

²⁴ APPP, 1W 186-51389: Correspondence, August 31, 1931. According to this document, Guérard was dismissed in August without a clear reason. If the hypothesis alluded to a negligence in her work due to unauthorized absences for the purpose of secretly joining Mr Fauconnier, a member of the FST, in fact this dismissal was probably the consequence of a dispute between Guérard and members of the leadership of the Jeunesses Communistes.

²⁵ *L’Humanité*, January 17, 1934.

²⁶ *L’Humanité*, July 16, 1934. Translated by the author.

²⁷ *Le Populaire*, December 28, 1934.

²⁸ *L’Humanité*, April 11, 1935; July 11, 1935; December 30, 1935.

was committed to promoting women's sports practices. During the 1930s, she was not only an influential leader in the management and the development of the federation, but also a major figure in women's sport in the French labour sports movement.

While Socialist and Communist sports federations pledged to merge, she saw in this rapprochement an opportunity to favour the development of women's sport, which remained on the margin of workers' sports organizations in France. According to her, women's sport had to acquire a real importance in the labour sport movement:²⁹

Let's look at one of the aspects of the action that we will be able to undertake. It is a question of rallying young girls and women to the practice of sport. Proletarian sport is for them a means of emancipation. Do they not develop physical and moral capacities to better defend their class interests?

Sport practice was understood as an emancipation tool for women, which would enable them to be fully accomplished and to acquire the same rights and duties as men. The emancipation that Guérard put forward contained a strong ideological dimension and differed significantly from the feminist approach. Women were not encouraged to free themselves from the yoke of men, but rather to oppose themselves to capitalist men:³⁰

[They] do not want women to play sports, if that is a way for her to get rid of prejudices, to move towards gender equality, to make herself more combative, more energetic and above all able to claim her rights. [...] That she is patriotic and docile to capitalist exploitation, that's what they want from her!

She believed sport contributed to women's emancipation by developing their class awakening and by integrating them into the proletarian struggle against capitalism, considered as the only

²⁹ *L'Humanité*, October 30, 1934. Translated by the author.

³⁰ *Sport*, August 1, 1934. Translated by the author.

cause of social inequalities, of which the main victims were women. Thus, the emancipation of sportswomen was less a gender issue, which would have risked dividing the working class, than a means of defending common values and interests of the working class as a whole.

If women's sport represented a way to emancipate women, Guérard noted it should not be seen as "an autonomous movement"³¹ within labour sport. Therefore, in the course of discussions on construction and organization of federal leadership in December 1934, she spoke out against the establishment of a specific women's commission.³² The FSGT was a gender-mixed federation where issues or problems of feminine and masculine sports practices had to be carefully and equally considered, unlike, in particular, the Fédération des Sociétés Féminines Sportives de France (FSFSF) chaired by Alice Milliat³³ and regularly castigated by Guérard.³⁴ However, the development of feminine sports practice lacked coordination, so she proposed to create a regional women's commission close to the Regional Committee of the Seine, in February 1936. In the first months, this specific body claimed some early successes by organizing sports events that gave more visibility to women's sport, such as the first edition of Sportswoman Day, or by expanding the range of sports, with rhythmic dance classes for example.³⁵ Through this commission for women's sport, she also saw the opportunity to support the development of new sportswomen's sections in some clubs or

³¹ *L'Humanité*, October 30, 1934. Translated by the author.

³² *Le Populaire*, December 25, 1934.

³³ See Florys Castan-Vicente's work on this in chapter three of this volume.

³⁴ Rose Guérard denounced women's unsuitable, and sometimes excessive, sports practices and criticized adulation of the champions within the FSFSF, described as a bourgeois Federation. The communist sportswoman accused this women's sports organization of dividing workers and of diverting labour sportswomen from working-class interests. *Sport*, February 7, 1934; February 28, 1934. *L'Humanité*, October 30, 1934.

³⁵ *Sport*, October 31, 1936.

women-only clubs. Her intention was to make the membership for girls and women as easy as possible by answering the concerns of those who, often for moral reasons, feared to be among boys and men or to practice unsuitable exercises or activities. With her experiences, she realized women's sport could not be considered only as a part of the labour sports movement, instead, to grow, it had to be understood on its own terms.

Guérard quickly changed her mind about the value of a federal commission for women's sport in the FSGT and insisted at the end of 1936 on establishing one amongst the federal sports commissions.³⁶ The aim of this specific federal body was to give a real impetus to women's sport throughout the federation, in each regional committee and each club or section. She became responsible for the federal commission for women's sport and continued to lead and manage the development of women's sport until early 1939. For this work she was praised as a "devoted comrade" and an "active leader" within the French labour sport movement.³⁷

In almost five years, Rose Guérard had become one of the most influential figures of labour sport in France, playing an important role in establishing and developing the Federation between 1934 and early 1939 through her involvement in various federal bodies. If she was the only woman leader to have access to the central functions of the organization, her path should not overshadow those of other women's sport leaders, who also held federal positions but played a more secondary or a more discreet role within the FSGT at the same time.

Women's access to federal responsibilities within the FSGT, a limited achievement?

If Guérard was certainly the most visible woman leader in the second half of the 1930s, other

³⁶ Sabatier, "Rose Guérard", 124.

³⁷ *L'Humanité*, November 23, 1936. Translated by the author.

women had leadership experience within the FSGT in the same period – though this remained more inconspicuous from a historical perspective. Valentine Signeux, born September 16, 1905 in Paris, had joined the Red Sports movement in the 1920s by becoming a member of the *Club Athlétique Ouvrier* (CAO) in the 18th arrondissement, where she mainly practiced swimming. She was a federal sports leader for no more than two years in the FSGT. Denise Briday, born on 17 May 1905 in Aubervilliers, near Paris, was also a sportswoman of the Red Sport organization, where she started to play basketball in 1929.³⁸ She obtained her first leadership responsibilities within the FSGT in the mid-1930s, which corresponds to the first step of her long leadership career in the labour sport movement. Lucienne Kling joined the *Union Sportive Ouvrière* (USO) in the 12th arrondissement of Paris in the early 1920s.³⁹ Originally, it was a workers' sports club affiliated to the FST, but in 1932 leaders broke with Red Sport and decided to link their club to the USSGT. She continued practicing athletics and basketball in this club, and in the Socialist sport federation. She held some responsibilities within the FSGT until 1939, like Gisèle Balay, who was a member of the *Solidarité Sportive*, an USSGT-club until the end of 1934.

These women had different sporting backgrounds before becoming leaders, and they held some responsibilities over varying periods, but all of them ultimately won similar federal positions. Their presence in the *Bureau Fédéral* of the FSGT was restricted to two commissions only.⁴⁰ Each of these four new leaders joined the finance commission of the

³⁸ *La Vie de la FSGT*, December 1946, 3-4.

³⁹ *L'Humanité*, June 22, 1922.

⁴⁰ Compositions of the Bureau Fédéral were reconstituted using the following archives: Archives of the FSGT, 2009-015-002: Journal of Sessions, December 30, 1935; December 26–7, 1936; December 19, 1937. *Le Populaire*, December 28, 1934; December 31, 1935; January 5, 1937; May 11, 1939.

Federation at least once. Balay was a member of this federal body between December 1934 and 1939, and she was joined for just one year by Signeux and by Kling, and for two years by Briday. The finance commission aimed to manage the budget and to deliberate about the financial strategy of the federation. The control commission was the second body of the federal leadership in which women leaders could obtain a position. Its purposes were notably to ensure the proper conduct of federal meetings and to verify budgetary situations. Kling spent five years in this commission, while Briday joined it between December 1935 and 1939, and Signeux for two years from December 1934. The women's access to federal responsibilities within the FSGT therefore came up against a "glass ceiling", which limited women leaders to secondary functions. This integration exclusively focused on particular federal bodies was a reflection of the structure and the organization of the working world during the interwar period.

Roles given to women were concentrated in specific areas, mainly related to accounting and secretarial work. Distribution of responsibilities was based more on skills traditionally associated with women at that time – secretary or accountant were for example jobs almost exclusively entrusted to women⁴¹ – than according to their real professional background. Indeed, they had very different career paths, whether as dyer and seamstress like Signeux,⁴² or as accountant like Briday.⁴³ It is undeniable that gender issues had largely determined positions awarded to women in the federal leadership, nevertheless it is difficult to evoke a gendered division of responsibilities that echoes the notion of gendered division of labour. Men leaders did not restrict themselves to any kind of responsibility, and thus they

⁴¹ Sylvie Sweitzer, "Les enjeux du travail des femmes," *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 75 (2002): 21–2.

⁴² APPP, 77W 1485-27057: Reports about Valentine Signeux, February 18, 1932, and October 1934.

⁴³ APPP, 1W 2085-112-696: Report about Denise Briday, October 18, 1956.

had access to these finance commission and control commission too, being even more numerous than women.

The composition of the total headcount also shows another important limit on women's access to federal positions.⁴⁴ At the end of the Merger Congress, of the 42 leaders within the various commissions, women leaders represented around 9.5 per cent of the total, so their place was very circumscribed. The quantitative distribution of federal responsibilities confirmed this disparity, since women leaders did not get more than 10 per cent in this first *Bureau Fédéral*. The following year, at the first National Congress of the labour sport Federation organized in Lille on December 1935, the inclusion of Denise Briday brought the proportion of women among all the federal leaders to nearly 11 per cent while they comprised a little more than a 14 per cent share of broader positions in the federation.

At first glance, this insignificant presence of women within the federal leadership was necessarily a consequence of the very low proportion of sportswomen in the FSGT during its early establishment. Nevertheless, while women's sport was experiencing good momentum and its membership was strengthened gradually,⁴⁵ the influence of women in the federal leadership was not growing. On the contrary, when Signeux decided to move away from management at the second National Congress, women's positions returned to the same level as two years previously. Women's difficulty in gaining greater power in the FSGT leadership coincided with the reaffirmation of a more conservative vision of women's role in French society more broadly. In the mid-1930s, natalist concerns were reinforced in France, as in a

⁴⁴ Values expressed in this passage have been estimated from lists of leaders published in the daily newspaper *Le Populaire* after each Congress of the FSGT.

⁴⁵ Marianne Amar, "'La sportive rouge' (1923–1939). Pour une histoire des femmes au sein du sport ouvrier français," In Pierre Arnaud (ed.), *Les origines du sport ouvrier en Europe*. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994): 188.

large part of Europe, and led to the defence of a familial model.⁴⁶ Women were then essentially considered through their maternal role, which meant firstly giving birth to children, and secondly taking care of the well-being of the household. At that time, these familial considerations were also shared within the socialist⁴⁷ and communist movements.⁴⁸ Women were more encouraged to take care of motherhood and their family, rather than being encouraged to hold responsibilities within associations. In this context, no other woman became a member of the labour sport leadership until the Second World War. In 1939, Guérard did not retain her several functions, which brought the feminine presence within the Bureau Fédéral to its lowest level since December 1934, with just 7.3 per cent of all leaders, and only 8.3 per cent of all federal offices.

We could argue that the weak women's presence in the leadership, which even tended to decline in the 1930s could be related to two main factors. One would be that of self-censorship. Because of the conceptions of their role in society during the interwar period, women would feel neither concerned by sports affairs nor capable of holding offices.

⁴⁶ Brigitte Studer, "La femme nouvelle," In Michel Dreyfus (ed.), *Le siècle des communismes*. (Paris: Les Editions de l'Atelier, 2000): 283.

⁴⁷ Gruber, "French Women in the Crossfire of Class," 308.

⁴⁸ Eric D. Weitz, Christine Bard and Jean-Louis Robert argue in their studies that the French Communist Party emphasized women through their femininity, their seductive power and their maternity, especially from 1936: Eric D. Weitz, "The Heroic Man and the Ever-Changing Woman: Gender and Politics in European Communism. 1917–1950," In Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose (eds.), *Gender and Class in Modern Europe*. (London: Cornell University Press, 1996): 339; Christine Bard and Jean-Louis Robert, "French Communist Party and Women, 1920–1939. From "Feminism" to "Familialism," In Helmut Gruber and Pamela Graves (eds.), *Women and Socialism, Socialism and Women. Europe between the Two World Wars*. (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998): 321–47, here 340–42.

Moreover, the defence of the familial model, along with conservative gender roles, was influential within the communist sport movement. At that time, no action was taken within the FSGT to increase the recruitment of women leaders⁴⁹. To integrate, as a woman, into the federal leadership of the French labour sport movement, it was therefore necessary to have some particular provisions and a specific profile.

Particular characteristics of women leaders' profiles in the labour sports

Federation

To have careers as sports leaders, which remained uncommon for women during the second half of the 1930s, the five women leaders unsurprisingly had characteristics favourable to their commitment to sports affairs. Although levels of social or personal information about these labour sport leaders are very disparate and unbalanced, a comparative approach allows us to reconstruct the main lines of their trajectories in order to delineate the favourable factors to their recruitment in the federal leadership. By focusing on their previous sport leadership experiences and on their social, family and political situations, it is possible to determine the profile of the first women leaders of the FSGT.

Women with previous sport leadership experiences at different levels

Before being integrated into the *Bureau Fédéral* of the FSGT, the five sportswomen had already held responsibilities within French workers' sports organizations, both in their clubs and their regional committees. Their integration into these leadership bodies, which allowed

⁴⁹ By way of comparison, within the Arbeiter-Turn-und Sportbund, the German labour sport

Federation, actions were taken in the 1920s to increase the number of women in the federal leadership. In 1926, it was enshrined in the statutes of the federation that two members of the Executive Board must be women leaders. Gounot, *Die Rote Sportinternationale*, 137.

them to develop their knowledge of sport management and leadership experience, was done at different rates and thanks to different opportunities.

In the 1920s Signeux was active in the CAO-18th as a member of the control commission, and she was also regularly the contact person for the organization and preparation of sports events, a responsibility that Kling also held within the USO-12th. Opportunities for new functions opened up at the turn of the twenties and the thirties, when the FST faced a crisis over its political orientation, which caused deep reconfigurations of club leaderships. In 1928, while the French Communist Party accentuated its propaganda towards the masses by applying the class-versus-class tactics decided by the Communist International,⁵⁰ the FST, as an auxiliary organization, tried to intensify its political work. But this moment of ideological radicalization caused reaction from the French Government, which systematically banned Red Sport events.⁵¹ Tensions then increased between proponents of the radical current and proponents of the apolitical trend led by Jean Garchery, leading to cracks in the administration of French workers' sport. The Red Star Club Ouvrier in Montreuil, of which Guérard was a member, defended the communist identity of the FST and decided to remove leaders who went against the political line.⁵² In the new leadership of the club,

⁵⁰ Wolikow Serge, *L'Internationale communiste (1919–1943) : le Komintern ou le rêve déchu du parti mondial de la révolution*. (Paris: Editions ouvrières, 2010), 80.

⁵¹ André Gounot, "Sport ouvrier et communisme en France, 1920–1934 : une rencontre limitée," *Stadion. Revue internationale d'histoire du sport*, no. 23 (1999): 96–7. In 1927, the French government passed a circular to suppress Communist organizations. The FST was mainly subject to enforcement actions from 1929 until the repeal of this circular in 1932.

⁵² Fabien Sabatier, *Histoire des organisations sportives communistes de France au XX^e siècle*. (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2013): 146.

exclusively composed of pro-communist leaders, she was entrusted with the function of assistant treasurer.⁵³

Conversely, Kling's club, the USO-12th chaired by Jean Garchery, broke with Red Sport in 1932 following the rise of political radicalism in the French workers' sport Federation and moved closer to the USSGT.⁵⁴ She had joined the USO-12th in the early 1920s, before the FST became a section of the Sportintern, and she never seemed to agree with the ideological orientations of workers' sport. Membership in this workers' sport Federation was not restricted to communist sympathizers and many members had often joined its clubs for practical reasons, such as proximity of the stadium, presence of relatives, or a lower cost of registration.⁵⁵ During the fissure crisis, she acquired a leadership position in her club by becoming secretary and she took advantage of her status to speak out against communist influence, which led to her being sanctioned within the FST.⁵⁶ When the USO-12th was definitively affiliated to the USSGT, Kling kept her function for two years, then she was appointed assistant secretary, dealing in particular with memberships.⁵⁷ Whether supporting ideological orientations of Red Sport, or advocating a break with communist organizations, this crisis had led women to assert their commitment and to take on more responsibilities within their club.

⁵³ APPP, 1W 186-51389: Note from the Special Police Commissioner to the Police Prefet, August 26, 1930.

⁵⁴ *L'Humanité*, March 3, 1932.

⁵⁵ Gounot, "Sport ouvrier et communisme," 95.

⁵⁶ *L'Humanité*, February 9, 1932; February 14, 1932. She was punished because of her behaviour on stadium during sport events, and she was accused of having chanted her opinion through a vulgar scream: "FST down the toilet!".

⁵⁷ *Le Populaire*, September 7, 1934.

The future women leaders of the FSGT had also increased their leadership experience within regional committees, in the socialist or communist sports movements. On the side of the USSGT, Kling and Balay were chosen as members of the women's sports commission of the Regional Committee of the Seine in 1933.⁵⁸ Kling kept her position until the dissolution of the Socialist sports federation but Balay remained in this commission for only one year. Kling also spent time for the Regional Committee of the Seine as a member of the referee's commission,⁵⁹ a field she knew well because she regularly refereed basketball matches. The commitment of Gisèle Balay to the Regional Committee of the Seine started almost a year before she acquired responsibilities in the federal leadership when she integrated the control commission in February 1935, alongside her sister Suzanne and Denise Briday. On the side of Red Sport, Signeux was very active in the Committee of the Parisian region since she entered into the agitation/propaganda commission in the beginning of the thirties. These sportswomen's experiences in local and regional sports organizations had allowed them to demonstrate their leadership qualities and skills. So, they asserted their legitimacy to claim certain federal responsibilities.

If most of these sportswomen obtained their first leadership experience at local or regional scale, the leadership trajectory of Guérard could be seen as rather unusual because she joined the federal leadership of the FST directly. In spring 1929, Guérard was granted her first responsibilities by becoming secretary of the federal commission for women's sport, a specific body set up in early 1924 and hitherto led by men only. Her ability to be an executive within the workers' sport movement was detected at the Spartakiad, organized by Sportintern and the Committee for Sports and Physical Culture associated with the Central Committee of

⁵⁸ *Le Populaire*, February 14, 1933.

⁵⁹ *Le Populaire*, February 9, 1934.

the Soviet Union, in August 12 to 24, 1928 in Moscow; the pinnacle event of international workers' sport.⁶⁰

During her Soviet visit, accompanied by 23 other FST members, she clearly supported Revolutionary thinking and, in order to highlight the glorious successes of the proletarian victory, she paid particular attention to recent advances in Soviet society. Specific tours were organized by the Soviets to different museums, including those of the Kremlin and the Red Army, and also to nurseries, factories, and the Institute of Physical Culture,⁶¹ but that did not prevent Guérard from taking personal initiatives. She took advantage of a day off to go, accompanied by one of her comrades, to the Headquarters of the Red International of Labour Unions in order to learn about the unions and their role in sports issues.⁶² They ended the day with a visit to the State Department Store (GUM), and a nursing home of the Red Army. Guérard's willingness to discover and better understand the Soviet world through her sports experience in the USSR allowed her to strengthen her political and ideological convictions and showed her unwavering commitment to the underlying mission of the FST.

Her exemplary behaviour was seen throughout the stay in the Soviet Union by Russian and French guides of the delegation. She was mentioned in a confidential report about the French delegation as a "Very serious comrade, having been the soul of the women's delegation ... By far, far superior to the others," and it was stressed that she was able to "do

⁶⁰ Rachel Mazuy, *Croire plutôt que voir ? Voyages en Russie soviétique, 1919–1939* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2002): 243.

⁶¹ *L'Humanité*, August 25, 1928.

⁶² Rose Guérard described her sports trip in Moscow during the Spartakiad in her Travel Diary. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Mr Sabatier Fabien, Lecturer at the University of Bordeaux, for giving us access to this document.

all the work that one could ask of her”.⁶³ Leaders of Red Sport therefore granted her their trust, and she confirmed her potential to be a future executive when she came back to France by participating heavily in spreading propaganda related to the Spartakiad. She spoke at many conferences to promote workers’ sport and to defend its ideological principles. So, the sportswoman of Montreuil was considered a promising executive, and she obtained her first federal responsibility only a few months after her return to France.

Barely integrated into the federal leadership, she had to take a position in an important debate on political partisanship of the FST. Several workers’ sports leaders strongly contended the closeness of the Federation to the French Communist Party and they were opposed to the ideological influences of Red Sport International. According to them, a clear break with the communist movement was needed to avoid the repression conducted by the political authorities against communist organizations and to give a new impetus to French workers’ sports support for which had slowed.⁶⁴ On the contrary, it was necessary for Guérard to defend the communist identity and the unity of the FST. Therefore, she criticized both leaders behind the split and sportsmen who followed them outside of the Federation, including some of her former comrades in the French delegation at the Spartakiad in Moscow.⁶⁵ Due to her investment in favour of the principles and values of Red Sport, she was elected federal secretary in charge of liaison with Red Sport International. After a very unstable period within the FST, this function was created in 1932 to ensure a better diffusion and application of resolutions from Sportintern. In obtaining this responsibility, Guérard

⁶³ Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, funds 537-2-152: Secret report on the French workers’ sport delegation at the Spartakiad, Moscow, 1928. Translated by the author.

⁶⁴ Gounot, “Sport ouvrier et communisme,” 97–8.

⁶⁵ *L’Humanité*, December 21, 1931.

joined the main Secretariat of the Federation alongside Auguste Delaune, general secretary and Raoul Chapoan, treasurer.

Getting early responsibilities in leadership structures of workers' sports organizations was a key factor in later access to federal positions in the French labour sport federation. It was also a way to get into contact with other leaders of the workers' sports federations, and therefore to integrate networks that facilitated later access to federal leadership of the FSGT for these women.

Factors conducive to sportswomen's commitment to leadership careers

Although there are quite a few archives concerning the investigated women, it remains difficult to clearly establish the conditions of their involvement in a leadership career. However, it is possible to indicate several favourable factors, beyond sports issues. First, geographical aspects had an important role in determining the leadership commitment of women. Through this analysis of women leader's careers, it should be emphasised that each of them lived in Paris or its suburbs. More generally, all the recruitment of executives within the FSGT was largely concentrated around the Parisian pole. Proximity of gathering places and the power centre had certainly led members of the Parisian labour sports clubs to be more concerned with federal affairs, and to involve themselves more easily in the exercise of responsibilities than labour sportsmen practicing in the provinces far away from the leadership structure. There was a profound imbalance in terms of representation between sports organizations of the Paris region and those of the provincial regions.

It is also interesting to note women who subsequently joined the *Bureau Fédéral* of the FSGT all began their leadership trajectory while they were still very active sportswomen. For the most part, they were recruited as leaders when they were young women, about twenty years old for Guérard and Signeux. Briday accessed this position the latest, just before turning

30. All these sportswomen could be trained in leadership practices from early on, and thus they were quickly integrated within leadership networks of the Federation.

The labour sportswomen Guérard, Signeux and Briday were also all unmarried women and without children when they assumed their first responsibilities in the FSGT leadership. Although the family circumstances of Kling and Balay are not known, the personal situations of the three other women leaders confirms an overall trend: by not being married, it was less difficult and less complicated for a woman to be involved in associative domains. Whether consciously or unconsciously, they were further away from influence of prevailing family patterns that inculcated women in their obligations and their duties as women and mothers in a society dominated by a familial and paternalist model. Unlike Briday, who was still a single woman after the Second World War, living first with her parents,⁶⁶ Signeux and Guérard had partners. From the early 1930s, Signeux shared her life with Albert Hannotin, born February 15, 1904 in Paris,⁶⁷ and on December 31, 1936 Guérard married Robert Edouard Chatron, born October 13, 1907.⁶⁸ Their two partners were not unconnected with sports affairs because they both also had, leadership positions in workers' sport organizations.

Signeux's partner Albert was a member of the CAO-18th, the same club as Valentine, where he practiced swimming and water polo. He was the assistant secretary of this club in 1923, then he became one of the leaders of swimming in Red Sport as a treasurer of the federal swimming commission, and later as a member the Bureau Sportif in the Parisian Regional Committee.⁶⁹ In 1929, he participated in a sports trip to the Soviet Union as head of

⁶⁶ APPP, 1W 2085-112-696: Report about Denise Briday, October 18, 1956.

⁶⁷ APPP, 77W 1485-27057: Report about Valentine Signeux, February 18, 1932.

⁶⁸ APPP, 1W 186-51389: Report about Rose Guérard, July 5, 1949.

⁶⁹ *L'Humanité*, August 15, 1923; December 5, 1925; March 3, 1928.

a delegation of football worker players.⁷⁰ The following year, he was arrested and imprisoned for two months on the grounds of rebellion, for having gone to a sport event banned by the Police Prefect of Paris.⁷¹ Highly motivated in favour of the workers' sport movement, he continued to involve himself in sports affairs after the creation of the FSGT, particularly in the Swimming Commission of the Parisian Regional Committee.⁷² From his club to the federal leadership, through the Parisian Regional Committee, Guérard's husband Chatron also gradually obtained responsibilities at all levels. First, he was Secretary General and then Assistant Secretary of the CAO-18th.⁷³ Later, he became Secretary of Sports Affairs within the Parisian Regional Committee, and member of the *Commission Exécutive*, alongside Guérard, a position he held until the end of 1939.⁷⁴ Thus, the partnership of Guérard and Signeux did not disturb or break their leadership careers, but instead a family environment further strengthened their activities and their involvement within the FSGT.

Most women sports leaders had a political and ideological awareness, whether close to the socialist or the communist movements. Gisèle Balay was a socialist, therefore she decided in March 1936 to stand as candidate for the elections of the regional representatives of the Comité Fédéral Féminin Socialiste, but she got only a few votes and was elected as a substitute.⁷⁵ Without investing herself directly in political issues, Denise Briday showed deep sympathy for communist values and principles. Rose Guérard and Valentine Signeux, for

⁷⁰ State Archives of the Russian Federation, funds 7576-2-96: Report on the French delegation of workers football players, July 3 to August 16, 1929.

⁷¹ *L'Humanité*, February 17, 1930; February 19, 1930; March 20, 1930.

⁷² *Le Populaire*, August 2, 1938; November 9, 1938.

⁷³ APPP, 1W 186-51389: Report about Chatron, December 1942.

⁷⁴ APPP, 1W 186-51389: Police note, without date [after 1939].

⁷⁵ *Le Populaire*, March 9, 1936.

their part, were very committed communist militants, both in political and trade union organizations.⁷⁶ They were members of the Jeunesses Communistes, joining the 4th *Entente* of the French Federation. Guérard entered into the *Syndicat Général Unitaire des Employés Municipaux* (General Union of Municipal Employees), while Signeux joined the *Syndicat Général Unitaire du Textile* (General Union of Textile Workers), and then the clothing trade union. They shared these forms of militant involvement with their partners who were both members of the Communist Party, and very invested in union organizations.⁷⁷ By getting closer to political or union movements, the women were able to integrate networks of militants, which generally constituted a basis for the recruitment of future executives of political parties, of the Jeunesses Communistes, or even the labour sports federation.

The origins of the political education of these women are so difficult to establish because of a lack of data about their social or family backgrounds, but the case of Rose Guérard could be partly studied. Her political consciousness was largely awakened in her familial setting, especially with her father, Julien Jean Guérard a member of the Communist Party. During the 1920s, he was particularly active in politics, standing (unsuccessfully) twice in the national legislative elections, in May 1924 and in April 1928, and twice in the municipal elections, in 1925 in the district of Saint-Gervais and in 1929 in the district of Charonne.⁷⁸ So, she grew up with the pace of election campaigns and with the resonance of political rhetoric and speeches that emphasized communism and revolutionary ideas. She had also attended communist circles in her working life, because she was a secretary of the

⁷⁶ APPP, 1W 186-51389: Report about Guérard, October 1928; APPP, 77W 1485-27057: Reports about Signeux, February 18, 1932, and October 1934.

⁷⁷ APPP, 1W 186-51389: Police note, February 19, 1942; 77W 1485-27057: Report, February 18, 1932.

⁷⁸ APPP, 1W 186-51389: Investigation report, April 12, 1930.

communist Mayor Georges Marrane at the town hall of Ivry from November 1927.⁷⁹ Passionate about sports, he was the chairman of the Union Sportive du Travail of Ivry, a club affiliated to the FST, and encouraged the development of sports in the city by improving access to equipment and infrastructure. This certainly made him a charismatic and inspiring figure in the eyes of Guérard. In 1929, in the municipal elections, he tried to give greater political visibility to women by associating a woman, Marie Lefèvre, with the list of the Communist Party. It is possible this willingness to give a real role to women in politics had been able to encourage, or definitely convince, Guérard of her ability to acquire office in Red Sport at the same time.

By way of an overall summary, women who got federal positions in the leadership of the FSGT were sportswomen already having some sports leadership experiences at different levels despite their young age. Living in the Paris region, they were for the most part unmarried and had a developed political awareness. With the exception of Valentine Signeux, all these leaders were still in federal leadership in 1939, as the Second World War approached. The period of the war, and in particular the time of the occupation, had a decisive impact on the evolution of their leadership trajectories.

Trajectories of women sport leaders jostled by the Second World War

After the outbreak of the Second World War, the leadership of French labour sport was unsettled, following major political disagreements and ideological divisions that caused many changes in the Bureau Fédéral. Due to a lack of available sources and documentation, it has not been possible to accurately study the evolution of each woman's sport leadership career. Nevertheless, it would seem Lucienne Kling and Gisèle Balay, who were still members of the federal leadership on the eve of the war, moved away from their federal responsibilities

⁷⁹ APPP, 1W 186-51389: Investigation report, April 4, 1940.

during the conflict, these two women no longer appearing on the lists of labour sport leaders after the Liberation. Only the trajectories of Rose Guérard and Denise Briday can be followed until the Liberation, allowing us to understand two really different daily lives during the war and under the Nazi occupation. Their war experiences deeply changed and opposed their leadership itinerary, involving a total removal of federal responsibilities for one, and a strengthened investment within the leadership of the FSGT for the other.

The end of the federal leadership career of Rose Guérard during the war

When the French government declared communist organizations illegal in September 1939, at the beginning of the war, Guérard decided to steer clear of the labour sport and the communist movement. Her decision did not affect her political convictions or her sympathy for the Soviet Union. Indeed, she refused to denounce the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, in spite of the call issued by the leadership of the FSGT, dominated by the socialist delegates.⁸⁰ Her husband, Robert Chatron shared the same convictions and became one of the main opponents of the federal leaders before being excluded like other communist delegates on October 15, 1939.⁸¹ Because of their political activities during the interwar period, and in the absence of a visible rupture with their ideological positions, the couple were under the surveillance of Police and Intelligence services.

For nearly three years, they were regularly confronted by Police authorities, through investigations and searches. In early spring of 1940, they were suspected of working in favour of the Third Communist International and “to be engaged in a sneaky propaganda for

⁸⁰ Sabatier, *Histoire des organisations sportives communistes*, 146.

⁸¹ *Le Populaire*, December 14, 1939.

ideologies of ‘Moscou’.”⁸² An investigation report about Guérard stated she had made critical remarks about the War Ministry, she had also denounced the militarization of the bourgeois sports organizations during several meetings in the 1930s, and she was the subject of rogatory letters with different leaders of the Jeunesses Communistes because of their defiant behaviours towards military forces.⁸³ Because of these different elements, an investigation was ordered at her home on April 9, 1940, but no charges were brought to prosecute Guérard or her husband. However, following the French defeat during the War, suspicions were relaunched under the Nazi occupation.

On 30 June 1940, Guérard was dismissed from her work at the town hall of Ivry, where the communist mayor Georges Marrane had already been ousted, because she was a communist militant before September 1939.⁸⁴ She was reinvested in October after committing to never participate in political activities again. Despite this engagement, she was again subjected to an investigation and a search on October 24, 1941.⁸⁵ These different Police actions could serve as a means of pressure to dissuade former political militants from mobilizing against political authority, and it could be used to find some information about Resistance networks. Once again, she and her husband demonstrated their total political disengagement. She affirmed her willingness to devote herself to her two very young

⁸² APPP, 1W 186-51389: Investigation report, April 4, 1940. Translated by the author. Original text:

“de se livrer à une propagande sournoise en faveur des idées moscoutaires (sic).” The word “Moscoutaire” does not exist in French, but it is used in this report to criticize international communism.

⁸³ APPP, 1W 186-51389: Investigation report, *ibid.*

⁸⁴ APPP, 1W 186-51389: Investigation report, November 10, 1942.

⁸⁵ APPP, 1W 186-51389: Investigation report, December 1942.

children,⁸⁶ and Chatron got a job as a fitter in a company that made safes. But, in the context of collaboration, letters of denunciation plunged Guérard and her family deeper into turmoil.

In a radio message broadcast at the end of October 1941, Marshal Pétain claimed that all those who helped the authorities to fight against Bolshevism would be rewarded. This announcement came a few days after the assassination of a German officer in Nantes by communist Resistance fighters and the promulgation of a law making denunciation legally binding.⁸⁷ In Montreuil, Guérard's workers' sports club, a mother heard this message and regained hope of finding her son, held prisoner in Germany. So, in order to obtain the release of her son, she denounced Guérard and her mother, Jeanne Léonie Guérard, as communist activists circulating leaflets and praising the Soviet Union. Having received no reply to the first letter of denunciation sent on November 27, 1941, she repeated her accusations in three other letters addressed to the Prefecture of Police on January 16, February 3, and March 16, 1942.⁸⁸ The following is an excerpt from the second letter⁸⁹:

Monsieur le Préfet,

I approach your high kindness to solicit your powerful intervention on my behalf with the high German authorities in order to obtain from them the reward proclaimed by the radio in the voice of our Marshal to whoever would participate according to his means towards the fight against Bolshevism, therefore, Mr. Prefect, I have confidentially denounced to you two fervent Communist militants propagandists towards Russia, and you were in all respects satisfied with all my declarations, I wrote to you on January 17th, asking that you recommend me in the hope of obtaining in exchange the release of my son prisoner

⁸⁶ Their daughter was born on April 26, 1940, and their son was born on October 5, 1941.

⁸⁷ Laurent Joly (ed.), *La délation dans la France des années noires*. (Paris: Perrin, 2012).

⁸⁸ APPP, 1W 186-51389: Note, February 16, 1945.

⁸⁹ APPP, 1W 186-51389: Letter of denunciation from Mrs K. to the *Préfet de Police de Paris*,

February 3, 1942. Only this letter of denunciation has been kept in the file "Guérard/Chatron".

in Germany XXX XXX [...] Mr. Prefect I come again by letter to ask you again for action and protection in my favour with the high German authorities who if it is necessary could call upon me, which would be a great honour for me.

In the hope that you will obtain satisfaction, I have come to thank you from the depths of my heart and ask you, Sir, to accept the expression of my highest consideration.

Madame K.

Despite the persistence of these denunciations, Jeanne Guérard was not prosecuted because she was only known by the police authorities for attending meetings and demonstrations led by communist organizations between 1936 and 1938.⁹⁰ So, she was not viewed as an active political militant. Concerning her daughter, the investigation report provided no new information and concluded accusations were only based on pre-war facts. However, it was recalled she had “never denied her political feelings”⁹¹; this clarification took on a particular meaning a few months later.

In the course of 1942, communist Resistance networks intensified their activities in occupied France. To fight these networks, the authorities made numerous arrests of men and women who had been close to the communist movement and were likely to be directly or indirectly connected with the Resistance. In this context, Rose Guérard and Robert Chatron were now, more than ever considered as communist sympathizers. At the same time, Robert Chatron was suspected of engaging in clandestine activities; according to the services of the *Renseignements Généraux*, he had not worked for several months and his new activities were not known.⁹² They were finally arrested at the request of the Police Prefecture on September

⁹⁰ APPP, 1W 186-51389: Investigation report, February 19, 1942.

⁹¹ APPP, 1W 186-51389: Investigation report, February 19, 1942.

⁹² APPP, 1W 186-51389: Report, December 1942.

24, 1942.⁹³ Under the decree published on November 18, 1939, concerning measures to be taken against individuals dangerous to national defence or public security, they were transferred to the administrative detention camps of la Lande de Monts – exclusively reserved for women⁹⁴ – and Pithiviers; both camps were devoted to political prisoners from September 1942. Through her mother, Guérard obtained the support and the help of the Mayor of Ivry, Henri Jacquelin.⁹⁵ He asked for the release of his employee after confirming she had no links with political activities, and she was devoted to her family life. Having to sign a commitment to break with communism and syndicalism, and to “respect the institutions currently in force and to do nothing against the Marshal and the French Government,” she obtained her release on 24 November 1942.⁹⁶ A month later her husband was also released, and they were never again suspected or disturbed by the Police and Intelligence Services.

Because of her traumatic experiences during the Second World War, Guérard appeared definitely more cautious about her political, union and sports engagement thereafter. At the Liberation, she did not claim any federal position within the FSGT, and she put a final point to a federal leadership career. Remaining a member of the federation, she preferred to dedicate herself to building and developing a section of rhythmic gymnastics in the Montreuil

⁹³ APPP, 1W 186-51389: Notice of administrative detention concerning Guérard, September 24, 1942;

Notice of administrative detention concerning Chatron, September 24, 1942.

⁹⁴ Denis Peschanski, “L’internement des femmes dans la France des années noires,” In Jacques

Fijalkow (ed.), *Les femmes des années 1940 Juives et non Juives, souffrances et résistance*.

(Paris: Les Editions de Paris Max Chaleil, 2004): 95–112.

⁹⁵ APPP, 1W 186-51389: Letter from Rose Guérard to the Mayor of Ivry; Letter from the mother of

Rose Guérard to the Mayor of Ivry, October 1942; Letter from Henri Jacquelin to the Police

Commissioner of Ivry, October 21, 1942.

⁹⁶ APPP, 1W 186-51389: Commitment of loyalty signed by Guérard, November 24, 1942. Translated

by the author.

club;⁹⁷ she was an employee in the Montreuil town hall from 1944.⁹⁸ If she was very committed on political and ideological issues during the interwar period, she was an activist for the development of popular sport from after the war to her death in 1991.⁹⁹

Denise Briday: from the Resistance to the reconstruction of the FSGT

Close to the communist fringe of the FSGT, Briday had certainly moved away from her federal responsibilities at the exclusion of her comrades from the Commission Exécutive at the end of 1939. Her breaking with the Federation of labour sport was complete when the new leadership, dominated by Socialists, declared the Charte d'Unité null and void, in March 1940.¹⁰⁰ While the FSGT deviated from communist influences, Briday maintained contact with the excluded sports leaders who were mobilized by the French army against Nazi Germany. After the French defeat, which begot the occupation of northern and western France by the Nazis and the implementation of the Vichy Régime, soldiers were demobilized and, among them, some former sports leaders became active members of the Resistance. On the initiative of Auguste Delaune and Robert Mension, in November 1941 they formed a Resistance network, *Sport libre* (Freedom Sport).¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ APPP, 1W 186-51389: Note from Prefect's office, April 20, 1949.

⁹⁸ Sabatier, *Histoire des organisations sportives communistes*, 142.

⁹⁹ Sabatier, *Histoire des organisations sportives communistes*, 147–8.

¹⁰⁰ Sabatier, *Histoire des organisations sportives communistes*, 52

¹⁰¹ Nicolas Kssis, "Le réseau Sport libre et la persecution des sportifs juifs sous l'Occupation. La Résistance à l'antisémitisme d'Etat dans le sport," In Georges Bensoussan, Paul Dietschy, Caroline François and Hubert Strouk (eds.) *Sport, corps et sociétés de masse, le projet d'un homme nouveau*. (Paris: Armand Colin, 2012).

This Resistance group was absolutely opposed to the sports policy led by the French collaborationist government and denounced the substitution of the FSGT by the *Union Sportive et Gymnique du Travail* in 1942. *Sport libre* also fought against the Nazi occupation and French collaboration, especially regarding anti-Semitic laws that directly affected sport. Briday was quickly integrated within this Resistance network, the only one organized by labour sportsmen. Her experience allows us to approach the commitment of resistant women, who have long remained in the shadow of the experiences of men or emblematic female figures in historical research.¹⁰²

Briday's family and political situations indicate several factors that were conducive to her involvement in the underground Resistance. Firstly, like many Resistance women during the Second World War, she was single and without children. So, she was not subject to the traditional model of the family, which placed women under the civic authority of their husbands and considered that their essential role was to take care of the whole family home. This does not mean no married woman was active in the Resistance, but it should make clear that it was less culturally and socially difficult for single women to involve themselves in underground life.¹⁰³ Secondly, this woman from Paris was not very well known by the

¹⁰² The history of resistance women during the Second World War in France has been fully researched since the 1990s. cf. Françoise Thébaud, "Résistances et Libérations," *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire*, no. 1, 1995; Margaret Collins Weitz, *Les combattantes de l'ombre. Histoire des femmes dans la Résistance, 1940–1945*. (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997); Mechtild Gilzmer, Christine Levisse Touzé (ed.), *Les femmes dans la Résistance en France* (Paris: Tallandier, 2003); Roger Bourderon, "Redonner leur place aux femmes par la biographie : des résistantes communistes, Madeleine Vincent et Cécile Rol-Tanguy," *Cahiers d'histoire. Revue d'histoire critique*, no. 135 (2017): 137–44.

¹⁰³ Rita Thalmann, "L'oubli des femmes dans l'historiographie de la Résistance," *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire*, no. 1 (1995).

Intelligence Services because she had kept herself away from public life, like most women of her time. Therefore, she was able to discreetly join the underground Resistance.

Briday became a liaison agent for Delaune, one of the main people responsible for *Sport libre*. Briday's function consisted of establishing a link between network leaders and resisters, as well as sending letters and information; such work was often assigned to women because they were moderate towards the authorities and were not likely to be controlled by police.¹⁰⁴ After the arrest in July 1943 of Delaune, who died just few weeks later after having been tortured by the Gestapo, Briday continued her activities as a liaison agent for Mension.¹⁰⁵ He was a leader of *Sport libre* before becoming an official of the *Jeunesses Communistes*, and he decided to surround himself with several former members of the FSGT in order to revive this underground movement. Briday maintained her involvement within the Resistance throughout the period of Nazi occupation. At the time of the Liberation, during summer 1944, she decided to resume her federal leadership career and to participate in the reconstruction of the FSGT.

On September 9, 1944, Briday went to the *Mutualité* hall for a meeting to rebuild the Federation.¹⁰⁶ This reconstruction was marked by the imprint of the Resistance. Most participants were, until the beginning of the war, leaders from the communist fringe of the FSGT, and they had participated in Resistance activities under the occupation. They decided not to integrate former members and leaders who did not clearly support the Resistance –

¹⁰⁴ About role of women in the Resistance, from armed action to activities at home, or to the function of liaison agent: Claire Andrieu, "Les résistantes, perspectives de recherche," In Antoine Prost (ed.), *La Résistance, une histoire sociale*. (Ivry: Editions de l'Atelier, 1997): 69–94.

¹⁰⁵ *La Vie de la FSGT*, December 1946, 3–4.

¹⁰⁶ Archives of the FSGT, 2009-015-002: *Journal des séances*, meeting September 9, 1944.

such as Chatron¹⁰⁷ – and they excluded socialist leaders who applied directives from Vichy. Due to her commitment in the Resistance and her federal leadership experience before the war, Briday quickly got a position in the new federal leadership. She was elected to the Commission Exécutive and became the Treasure of the Federation.¹⁰⁸ As a leader of the FSGT, she joined the *Commission Interfédérale sur le Sport Féminin*, which brought together some leaders of different French sports federations, between 1947 and 1953, and thus she helped to promote women's sport.¹⁰⁹ Beyond sports issues, Briday was committed to defending women's rights by joining, with her sister Suzanne, the *Union des Femmes Françaises*.¹¹⁰ Briday had emerged from the Liberation as one of the most predominant leaders of the FSGT, and she took over from Guérard to ensure the presence of a woman in a federal leadership organization that, nevertheless, remained largely dominated by men.

Conclusion

To conclude, at the time of the establishment of the FSGT, women's access to federal positions of responsibility was effective and wider than in the previous French workers' sports federations. However, it was quickly confronted with different limits. Recruitment of women leaders was not progressive and regular until the eve of the Second World War, remaining restricted to the few women who entered into the federal leadership in its first two years. Moreover, if Rose Guérard acquired more central federal functions, the four other women leaders only got second-rate positions. Despite an encouraging first impetus, the FSGT had not conducted any policy in order to integrate women leaders nor anchored in its

¹⁰⁷ Sabatier, *Histoire des organisations sportives communistes*, 147–8.

¹⁰⁸ Archives of the FSGT, 2009-015-002: Journal of Sessions, meeting on June 18, 1946.

¹⁰⁹ *Sport et Plein Air*, December 1984, 19.

¹¹⁰ APPP, 77W 4180-423790: Profile of Denise Briday in a report about the FSGT, April 1960.

Articles measures to enhance their access to federal responsibilities. Therefore, only a few women could become directly concerned by federal affairs and demonstrated a willingness to become involved in leadership bodies.

Analysis of unsung women's leadership careers reveals interesting trajectories, far beyond sport issues alone. In approaching their sports experiences, the aim is not only to highlight their role in the development of labour sports organizations, but also to contribute to the understanding of women's place in the society and women's position in history. If sport clearly reflects the dominance of the male model of society during the interwar period, it also shows that in the same society a few women have been able to break this framework and to gain responsibility in some fields. Although these women sport leaders were a minority and did not, for the most part, hold central federal positions, they participated in the feminine conquest of responsible positions and contributed – consciously or unconsciously – to take a short but important step in the affirmation of women's role in society.

Shortly after the Liberation, the FSGT continued its reconstruction and a few other women leaders appeared in the federal leadership, like Odette Pouliquen who was elected member of the Commission Exécutive, alongside Denise Briday.¹¹¹ The presence of these two women among many men within this federal body shows that, at the end of the Second World War, the road to wider access to the most central responsibilities was still long for the labour sport Federation. This does not mean women were not more present and active in different leadership bodies at different levels. Each of the women studied here was also involved with her club or regional committee, and other women were generally present in these different leaderships. In order to reveal the real place of women in the organization, management, and the development of French labour sport during the second half of the 1930s, it is necessary to get closer to the regional committees and clubs of the FSGT, levels in which women seemed

¹¹¹ Archives of the FSGT, 2009-015-002: Journal of Sessions, meetings on March 29, 1948.

more represented. This would help to continue to give back to the unsung women and sportswomen the real role they had played in sports organizations throughout history.

Bibliography

Amar, Marianne. “‘La sportive rouge’ (1923–1939). Pour une histoire des femmes au sein du sport ouvrier français.” In Pierre Arnaud ed. *Les origines du sport ouvrier en Europe*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 1994, 167–91.

Andrieu, Claire. “Les résistantes, perspectives de recherche.” In Antoine Prost ed. *La Résistance, une histoire sociale*. Ivry: Editions de l’Atelier, 1997, 69–94.

Bard, Christine and Jean-Louis Robert. “French Communist Party and Women, 1920–1939. From ‘Feminism’ to Familialism.” In Helmut Gruber and Pamela Graves eds. *Women and Socialism, Socialism and Women. Europe between the Two World Wars*. New York: Berghahn Books, 1998, 321–47.

Bourderon, Roger. “Redonner leur place aux femmes par la biographie : des résistantes communistes, Madeleine Vincent et Cécile Rol-Tanguy.” *Cahiers d’histoire. Revue d’histoire critique*, no. 135 (2017): 137–44.

Gilzmer, Mechtild and Christine Levisse Touzé, eds. *Les femmes dans la Résistance en France*. Paris: Tallandier, 2003.

Gounot, André. *Die Rote Sportinternationale, 1921–1937. Kommunistische Massenpolitik im europäischen Arbeitersport*. Münster: LIT Verlag, 2002.

Gounot, André. *Les mouvements sportifs ouvriers en Europe (1893–1939). Dimensions transnationales et déclinaisons locales*. Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2016.

Gounot, André. “Le rassemblement international des sportifs contre le fascisme et la guerre : Paris 1934.” In Pierre Arnaud and Alfred Wahl, *Sports et relations internationales*.

- Actes du colloque de Metz-Verdun septembre 1993*. Metz : Centre de recherches histoire et civilisation de l'Université de Metz, 1994, 157–72.
- Gounot, André. “Sport ouvrier et communisme en France, 1920–1934 : une rencontre limitée.” *Stadion. Revue internationale d’histoire du sport*, no. 23 (1999): 84–112.
- Gounot, André. “Les Spartakiades internationales, manifestations sportives et politiques du communisme.” *Cahiers d’histoire. Revue d’histoire critique*, no. 88 (2002): 59–75.
- Gruber, Helmut. “French Women in the Crossfire of Class, Sex, Maternity and Citizenship.” In Helmut Gruber and Pamela Graves eds. *Women and Socialism, Socialism and Women. Europe between the Two World Wars*, New York: Berghahn Books, 1998, 279–320.
- Joly, Laurent ed. *La délation dans la France des années noires*. Paris: Perrin, 2012.
- Kssis, Nicolas. “Le réseau Sport libre et la persecution des sportifs juifs sous l’Occupation. La Résistance à l’antisémitisme d’Etat dans le sport.” In Georges Bensoussan, Paul Dietschy, Caroline François and Hubert Strouk eds. *Sport, corps et sociétés de masse, le projet d’un homme nouveau*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2012.
- Lenskyj, Helen. *Women, Sport and Physical Activity: Research and Bibliography*. Ottawa: Minister of State, Fitness, and Amateur Sport, 1988.
- Louveau, Catherine. “Inégalité sur la ligne de départ : femmes, origines sociales et conquête du sport.” *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés*, no. 23 (2006): 119–43.
- Mazuy Rachel. *Croire plutôt que voir ? Voyages en Russie soviétique, 1919–1939*. Paris: Odile Jacob, 2002.
- Peschanski, Denis. “L’internement des femmes dans la France des années noires.” In Jacques Fijalkow ed. *Les femmes des années 1940 Juives et non Juives, souffrances et résistance*. Paris: Les Editions de Paris Max Chaleil, 2004, 95–112.

- Pennetier, Claude and Bernard Pudal. "La part des femmes, des femmes à part..." In Claude Pennetier and Bernard Pudal eds. *Le sujet communiste. Identités militantes et laboratoires du « moi »*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2014, 165–89.
- Purvis, June. "Using Primary Sources When Researching Women's History from a Feminist Perspective." *Women's History Review* 1, no. 2 (1992): 273–306.
- Roberts, Mary Louise. *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Post-war France, 191–1927*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Sabatier, Fabien. *Histoire des organisations sportives communistes de France au XX^e siècle*. Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2013.
- Sabatier, Fabien. "Rose Guérard, militante du mouvement sportif ouvrier. Itinéraire d'une femme dans un monde d'hommes (1923–1945)." In Thierry Terret ed. *Sport et Genre, Tome 1. La conquête d'une citadelle masculine*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005, 119–32.
- Sohn, Anne-Marie. "Chronologie et dialectique entre féminin et masculin (XIX^e-XX^e siècles)." In Luc Capdevila, Sophie Cassagnes and Martine Cocard eds. *Le Genre face aux mutations. Masculin et féminin du Moyen Age à nos jours*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2003, 15–29.
- Studer, Brigitte. "La femme nouvelle." In Michel Dreyfus ed. *Le siècle des communismes*. Paris: Les Editions de l'Atelier, 2000, 277–87.
- Sweitzer, Sylvie. "Les enjeux du travail des femmes." *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 75 (2002): 21–33.
- Thalman, Rita. "L'oubli des femmes dans l'historiographie de la Résistance." *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire*, no. 1 (1995).
- Thébaud, Françoise, ed., "Résistances et Libérations." Special Issue of *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire*, no. 1 (1995).
- Thébaud, Françoise. *La femme au temps de la guerre de 14*. Paris: Payot, 2013.

Weitz, Eric D. "The Heroic Man and the Ever-Changing Woman: Gender and Politics in European Communism, 1917–1950." In Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose eds. *Gender and Class in Modern Europe*. London: Cornell University Press, 1996, 311–52.

Weitz, Margaret Collins, *Les combattantes de l'ombre. Histoire des femmes dans la Résistance, 1940–1945*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1997.

Wolikow, Serge. *L'Internationale communiste (1919–1943) : le Komintern ou le rêve déchu du parti mondial de la révolution*. Paris: Editions ouvrières, 2010.