

RUSSIA AND EASTERN EUROPE IN THE FUTURE OF THE MODERN OLYMPIC MOVEMENT

JIM RIORDAN
UNIVERSITY OF SURREY, UK

Introduction

Now that communist sports policy in Europe is consigned to the category of historical curiosities, we have an opportunity to examine some basic questions:

1. How successful was the policy in terms of sporting excellence?
2. How did it achieve apparent Olympic domination?
3. To what extent did the communist system bring sports success?
4. What are the likely implications for the Olympic movement of the demise of Soviet-style communism?

This address attempts to answer these questions.

How successful was communist sports policy?

The first point to make is that the policy was not everywhere identical; nor did it feature highly in national priorities in the less economically advanced communist nations, such as Albania, Vietnam and Kampuchea. Nonetheless, it did contain certain discernible similarities that marked it off from sport policies in the rest of the world.

One of the major distinguishing features of post-1945 communist sports policy was the drive to attain sporting supremacy, particularly through the Olympic Games. Where other channels were closed, success in sport, it was thought, would help such states as the Soviet Union, China, Cuba and East Germany, as well as many other countries in the developing world, to achieve a measure of recognition and prestige both at home and abroad. Sport here was unique in that for all communist countries, including the USSR and China, it was the only medium in which they were able to take on and beat the economically advanced nations, especially the USA. This took on added significance in view of what their leaders

traditionally saw as the battle of the two ideologies - capitalism and communism - for influence over the world. An official Soviet government resolution of 1949 claimed that,

The increasing number of successes achieved by Soviet athletes ... is a victory for the Soviet form of society and the socialist sports system; it provides irrefutable proof of the superiority of socialist culture over the moribund culture of capitalist states.¹

Cuba's leader, Fidel Castro, looked forward to the day when Cuba could prove the superiority of its national sport, baseball, over that of the United States: "One day, when the Yankees accept peaceful coexistence with our country, we shall beat them at baseball too and then the advantages of revolutionary over capitalist sport will be clear to all."²

Despite some setbacks, there is ample evidence to show that the economically advanced socialist states have gone a long way to achieving their aim of world Olympic supremacy. They provided two of the top three nations in the Summer Olympics since 1968 (except 1984, when they provided two of the top four despite the overwhelming communist boycott of the Los Angeles Games) and in the Winter Games since 1972. Even in the Barcelona Summer Olympics of 1992, when the USSR had already broken up (it performed as the 'Unified Team', which excluded athletes from the three Baltic states - Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia) and other East European countries were in disarray, the Unified Team beat its nearest challenger, the USA, and the two remaining communist nations, China and Cuba, came fourth and fifth respectively.

The Soviet Union, in fact, dominated the Olympic Games, summer and winter, ever since it made its debut in the summer of 1952 and the winter of 1956; it was challenged only by East Germany which gained more medals than the USA in the 1976 and 1988 summer Games, and more medals than the USSR in the 1980 and 1984 winter Olympics. The only interruption to communist victory was in 1968, when the USSR took second place to Norway in winter and to the USA in summer, and in the summer of 1984 when the major communist sporting nations did not compete.

China placed fourth in its very first Olympics in the summer of 1984, and again in 1992; Cuba has

moved steadily up to fifth position in the summer Olympics and has consistently won more medals than all the countries of South America put together.

The success of East Germany in cultivating elite athletes is seen in the fact that during the 1980s, in Olympic and world championship terms, calculated in per capita medals, the country (with a population of under 17m people) won one gold medal for every 425,000 citizens, by contrast with approximately one gold per 6,500,000 citizens in both the USSR and USA. In short, that means that an East German with sports talent was sixteen times more likely to gain an Olympic or world gold medal than a Soviet or US citizen.

For East Germany, therefore, to quote from a West German source,

Sport has played a vital role in breaching the blockade which, at the time of the Cold War, kept the GDR out of virtually all international relations outside the communist states. Because GDR sport attained international standards, and in many areas actually set those standards, world sports organizations were unable to ignore the country.³

This was an important step towards helping East Germany break out of its political isolation, gain credibility for the communist government among its own people, and be recognized as an independent state. Hence the high priority that the authorities accorded the development of sport and international sports performance.

The communist countries, therefore, were keenly aware of the advantages that were thought to accrue from sporting, and especially Olympic success, and so prepared their athletes accordingly. They believed that the Olympics brought more exposure and prestige, and were, in the view of some communist leaders, the measure of a nation's health and viability.

Let us look at Olympic performance from another angle. If we compare a group of economically advanced (26 Western states, including Japan) with eight major East European states (excluding Albania which did not compete), we may take into consideration the obvious general differences between them: the way the economy was organized, the way political decisions were made, and the level of economic development (measured as GNP). The fol-

lowing figure (Figure 1) has three columns: the first measures the number of Olympic medals that *one might have expected* in global terms from actual income; the second is the *actual number* of medals won; the third is the estimated number of medals these nations would have won *if they had had Western income*.

N.B. Figures from Manfred Gärtner, 'Socialist Countries' Sports Success before Perestroika and after? *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 24, 4, 1989, 287-289. Accordingly, we would have expected 77 medals for the Soviet Union on the basis of actual GNP produced, the highest number, and 15 medals for Hungary, the lowest number. Actual medal scores are given by the second, dashed column, and vary between 296 medals for the Soviet Union and 15 for Yugoslavia.

Not surprisingly, not a single communist state performs worse than it should according to actual GNP. For most countries, the difference between forecast and actual success is marked. For example, Hungary and the Soviet Union score some four times as many medals as they should according to their actual income levels, the East Germans score almost 11 times as many. This tells us that the communist states perform better than we would expect from their economic status. On average, per capita income in our group of communist countries is some US\$1,500 as compared to US\$3,900 for the group of Western states.

We may now examine whether the decision-making process in communist countries can make up for their economic backwardness. To do so, we may calculate a hypothetical 'free-market-equivalent income' for each communist state and work out the medal score implied by this income level. Thus, average communist per capita income is increased to average Western per capita income. Given this assumption, the third column in Figure 1 shows for each country how many medals we would expect if it had a free market economy, expecting each state to produce more medals with a capitalist income level. This is seen by comparing columns 1 and 3. What is striking is that all countries apart from Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia overcompensate their economic backwardness by a large amount and gain a much higher number of medals than we would anticipate if their production was determined by market forces.

The difference between the second and third columns indicates the net advantage of a communist state over a capitalist state in Olympic competition.

However, the picture changes dramatically if we look at communist performance in world soccer and tennis (see Figures 2 and 3).

As far as soccer is concerned, actual income levels appear to explain UEFA points fairly well; here socialist states are not even able to compensate for their economic backwardness, not to speak of over-compensation as in the case of the Olympics. Columns 1 and 2 are generally in line with each other, while the numbers in column 3 are not normally reached.

In the case of tennis, the picture changes even more radically from the one for the Olympics. Players from communist countries only win a fraction of the number of ATP-WITA points which they should win according to their income levels. The only exceptions are Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and, to a lesser extent, Yugoslavia.

Two obvious conclusions follow from the results shown in Figures 1-3:

- communist states outperform Western countries at the Olympics, but are much less successful in professional, non-Olympic (before tennis was introduced as an Olympic sport) sports such as soccer or tennis;

- success in professional tennis varies considerably across the communist states.

The explanation for these two conclusions are as follows. The Olympic Games comprise the entire spectrum of sports, ranging from those which are fully marketable to others in which success possesses no market value at all. On the whole, the latter predominate. Their significance, from a collective viewpoint, derives from the fact that medals won in wrestling or walking contribute equally to a country's medal score as medals won in showcase disciplines such as the men's 100m, ice hockey or downhill skiing.

Thus, East European sports leaders, who were mainly interested in the national prestige to be gained by a good aggregate performance, were most likely to push their talented athletes into the least competitive, but most medal-likely categories of sport (the major reason why Chinese sports leaders are concentrating on women's sports such as swimming and long-distance running at the moment⁴). Western sports leaders are also not unaware of the

prestige value of Olympic success either. But their possibilities, especially their funding, generally lag way behind the incentives set by the market. Such financial incentives lure the bulk of talented Western athletes into the marketable sports that dominate the media (golf, soccer, tennis, horse racing, basketball, ice hockey, baseball and American football).

As to the differences between communist states in regard to tennis and soccer performance, it is evident that in a state-controlled economy, government policy may easily override market signals, so virtually eliminating any success in professional sports like tennis - e.g. by not providing the required infrastructure or by not permitting athletes to travel and compete abroad, or by not providing coaches and training facilities, by not allowing players to keep their prize money, etc.

But the countries differed in the extent to which they permitted their pro tennis players to travel and compete abroad. For example, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria allowed their players to participate more freely in international tournaments than did East Germany or the Soviet Union.

All in all, it is apparent that the communist nations concentrated their sporting efforts on achieving success in the Olympic Games, where most medals won do not carry any worthwhile market value, but where each medal equally enhances international prestige by helping the country to finish high in the final medal table.

How did the communist states achieve sports success?

Ever since the first communist state came into existence in 1917 (the Soviet Union), communist leaders made explicit the dependence of external sports relations on foreign policy. It could hardly be otherwise in countries where sport was centrally directed and employed in the pursuit of specific socio-political objectives, including those of foreign policy. Sport was a political institution run by the state, and overall policy was laid down by the communist government. Decisions of national import concerning foreign sports policy - such as participation in the Olympic Games or in particular countries disliked by the ruling Communist Party - were therefore made by the Party. On occasion, it was a supranational body, like the Warsaw Pact, rather than a sovereign government, that decided policy, as

in the case of the Soviet-led boycott of the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984. For those communist states in Eastern Europe that had been closely tied to the USSR, it was often the Soviet Politburo that imposed a ‘fraternal’ sports policy upon them.

That is not to say that all communist leaderships acted in accord or collusion. China and Romania took part in the Los Angeles Games in the face of Soviet opposition. Cuba and Marxist-governed Ethiopia acted in solidarity with North Korea in boycotting the Seoul 1988 Summer Olympics, while all other communist states (save Albania which boycotted all Olympic Games up to Barcelona in 1992) competed.

To maximise effort and use scarce resources most efficiently, all sports facilities and clubs came ultimately under the control of the state which devised methods for discovering, nurturing and harnessing sports talent. To do this, it drew up a rankings system for each sport: when the athlete reached Master of Sport level, he/she was able to train full-time while following a tailor-made course at a higher educational institution for as long as the sports career lasted. It also had a network of sports schools and sports boarding schools which promising athletes might attend; it is significant that such boarding schools in both East Germany - 20 - and the Soviet Union - 42 - far exceeded all other residential schools for talent (e.g. in art, music, ballet) put together.

All communist states had a strong military presence in the sports movement through armed and security forces’ clubs, providing military sinecures for full-time athletes.

The parliamentary therefore provided many of the funds and facilities that enabled people to take up and pursue a sport, especially in sports involving expensive equipment (such as ice hockey, soccer, gymnastics, weightlifting, equestrianism). Talented athletes would therefore often receive an officer’s commission (lieutenant) in the armed forces, and perform for one of the armed forces’ clubs, such as the Central Sports Club of the Army (USSR and Bulgaria) or Wings of the Soviets (Soviet Air Force Sports Club). Alternatively, they would be members of the security forces’ tentacular sports club Dinamo (USSR, East Germany, Yugoslavia, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Albania) - though the funding and sponsorship by the security forces were kept a state secret prior to 1989 (see Table 1).

The point has to be made that, as a rule, centrally planned economies showed a tendency to cut off their top athletes from the ‘free market in athletic skills’ or, to put it in another way, to stop them seeking compensation for the private benefits which their activities yield for other people, such as spectators, TV companies, marketing companies, manufacturers, etc. This happens because the economic value of such private benefits was lower in communist economies, and because their athletes’ access to international markets was seriously restricted. On the other hand, of course, free market economies show the opposite tendency, to provide inadequate incentives for athletes who are primarily involved in the production of public benefits.

Being divorced from the ‘market’ in sporting talent, the communist states were able to establish and adhere to their own system of priorities involving their talented athletes. Only defections interfered with this process.

To what extent was the communist system responsible for communist Olympic success?

In talking of the ‘communist’ system, it is time to make the point that what developed in the so-called communist states was not ‘communism’ at all as envisaged by many past and present socialists who have always seen socialism and communism embodying three major principles: equality, democracy and common ownership. None of the communist regimes can be said to have produced more equality, even less democracy. There is no time here to investigate what it was, if not communism, that developed; let us say that we use the term ‘communist’ as a shorthand term for the totalitarian, state-run countries that labelled themselves ‘socialist’.

Table 1

| Country | Security Forces Club | Armed Forces Club |
|----------|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| USSR | Dinamo (Moscow, Kiev, Minsk, Tbilis, etc.) | TsSKA (Central Sport Club of the Army) |
| Bulgaria | Levski (Sofia), Dinamo elsewhere | TsSKA |

| | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| GDR | Dinamo (Berlin, Dresden) | Vorwarts |
| Yugoslavia | Dinamo (Zagreb) | Red Star |
| Rominia | Dinamo (Bucharest) | Steaua |
| Hungary | *** | Honved |
| P o l a n d | Gwardia | Legia |
| Czechoslovakia | Dinamo (Prague) | Dukla Liberec |
| Albania | Dinamo (Tirana) | *** |

We have already established that several communist states developed a sports system oriented on Olympic success. It should be self evident that it was not simply Marxist-Leninist ideology that inspired athletes to run faster, jump higher or pump more iron; many athletes and coaches who joined the ruling Communist Party did so, as they now admit, for career purposes. That is not to deny that, like religious believers, many felt a comfort and security in possessing a faith to give their lives spiritual meaning. And in the exciting battle of the ideologies, communism v. capitalism, who is to deny a desire to perform well for one's side - reds v. blues - especially given the frequent arrogance and hypocrisy shown by the capitalist adversary in such rivalries as West v. East Germany, USA v. Cuba or USSR?

The omnipotence of political control and centralized planning certainly enabled the communist system to concentrate resources on Olympic priorities to create maximum effect. And since Olympic domination was the priority, all the GDR's 20 sports residential schools and the USSR's 42 such schools pursued *only* Olympic sports (with one late exception - chess - in one Soviet sports boarding school). We have already seen how top athletes, with full state support, were able to climb the sports rankings ladder and, on reaching the Master of Sport rung, were able to train and compete full time, with financial security, using the best available facilities, coaches and science and medicine services. Central and local government, industry and trade unions (which ran sport outside the armed and security services), educational institutions (where most athletes followed a tailor-made course), science and

medicine all worked together, on instructions from above, to discover, monitor and nurture talent.

It is also the case that communist ideology put special emphasis on the power of science to bring about social change and human transformation, stressing human malleability and the power of the environment over the power of genes to shape nature. Not only did this philosophy find an echo in Karl Marx ('social being determining consciousness'), it also received scientific confirmation in the work of the Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936), with his work on conditioned reflexes and its tendency to assimilate psychology to physiology, its emphasis on the environmental conditioning of the human organism. Added to this scientific background, in states whose ideology elevated 'the common man' ('the cook and stable lad to statesman', in Lenin's terms), to the top of society, the conflation of mind and body was an analogous conflating of muscular and intellectual skills. In other words, a high performance athlete was as much an ideal as a ballet dancer or artists (as we have seen in the number of sports boarding schools, the athlete actually had much higher priority). Given the idealizing of athletes, therefore, it was only a short step to idealising scientific experimentation on them.

We need a caveat here. As John Hoberman has suggested, on the experience of East Germany, 'the mobilisation of the human organism on behalf of athletic achievement is not a specifically communist theme. It is possible, however, that ideological factors did make communist regimes more eager than others to develop high-performance athletes with the available methods.'⁵

There were, nonetheless, other factors, often obscured by our failure to see beyond communist ideology, that contributed to communist sports success at the Olympic Games.

The sports system in all communist states grew up with and was integral to the building of a strong nation-state which generated its own motivational forces. The same central control and planned application of resources, allied to state priorities and direction of labour, which initially achieved such remarkable success (in relatively backward states like Russia, China, Bulgaria, Romania) in constructing the infrastructure of socialist society, provided conditions that were more conducive to discovering, organizing and developing talent in specific sports

than those of the more disparate and private Western systems.

Allied to the construction of a strong nation-state was the development of nationalism, a national identity with the nation-state. This is a complex issue. The rapidity of post-totalitarian change in all areas, sport included, in Eastern Europe and the erstwhile Soviet Union would seem to indicate that the elite sports system and its attainments tended to provoke some popular resentment. This appeared to be more evident in those states - Poland, East Germany, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria - which had 'revolution' thrust upon them, along with an alien sports system and values contrary to their indigenous traditions. A similar mood became apparent, too, in Islamic areas of the old USSR. Sports stars were seen as belonging to a private, elite club within the overall domain; they were not part of a shared national achievement, let alone heritage. That is not to say that in societies of hardship and totalitarian constraint, the ordinary citizen obtained no vicarious pleasure in her/his champion's or team's performance. Overall, the dominant attitude was one not entirely different from Western class attitudes to sports and heroes which are not 'theirs' (e.g. the ambivalent attitude of many Western working people to Olympic show jumpers, yachtsmen and fencers).

On the other hand, in countries like the now defunct Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, as well as the Slav regions of the old Soviet Union (Russia, the Ukraine, Belorussia), the patriotic pride in sporting success and heroes would appear to have been genuine. One reason for this may be that the socialist revolution of 1917 in the old Russian empire, and of 1946 and 1948 in the cases of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, came out of their own experience and had some popular support. The same might be said of China, Cuba and Vietnam.

Generally speaking, Soviet leaders used sport to try to integrate the various socialist countries, to bind them to Soviet institutions and policies, and to maintain and reinforce the USSR's 'vanguard' position within the community. Relations tended to reflect the political tenor within the group, with the Soviet Union having to defend (or impose) its 'special relationship' as the 'first socialist state', and the other socialist nations having to strive for compensatory supremacies denied them elsewhere. In the period 1948-56, most of the other socialist states

(with Yugoslavia the notable exception) were more or less obliged to learn from the Soviet model, to form Soviet-type administrative structures, to make army and security forces (Dinamo) clubs dominant, and to run fitness programmes like the Soviet "Prepared for Work and Defence" - all this despite the long sporting traditions of countries like Hungary, Germany, Czechoslovakia after 1948; youth organizations involved in recreation, like the YMCA, the Scouts and the Jewish Maccabi, were also proscribed. Pre-1939 Olympic committees were disbanded on orders from Moscow, and their members often persecuted. As Gounnar Paal confirms, for example, Estonia's two prewar IOC members, Friedrich Akel and Joakim Puhk, 'were put to death by the NKVD (Soviet precursor of the KGB) for their public activity.'⁶

Being tied to the USSR also meant following Soviet foreign policy, including that on Olympic boycotts. The Soviet Communist Party decision to boycott the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics was simply passed down to other members of the Warsaw Pact - no sports or national Olympic committee, not to mention athletes -- were consulted. Romania demurred, though hardly for democratic reasons. Such contempt for national conditions finally provoked mass ire and hatred expressed violently in the uprisings of late 1989 in Eastern Europe, and subsequently in the Baltic states and the various non-Russian republics of the Soviet Union. Significantly, many prime targets of the popular outburst were precisely the Russian-imposed sports structures and institutions. But it would be misleading to identify sport wholly with the communist system and Russian diktat. Sport was an institution to which some lassitude could be shown and concessions made to national feelings. As the one-time Polish Olympic competitor Professor Wojciech Liponski has said, 'Sport was one of the very few areas where we could perform on our own behalf, under our own flag, etc.'⁷ Poland and the three Baltic states are apt examples of such concessions. While being incorporated into the Warsaw Pact and kept on a tight political rein from Moscow, they were permitted to retain a measure of independence in sport. For example, in Poland, an early concession to the Polish Socialist Party, in persuading it to merge with the Communists in the Polish United Workers' Party in 1949, was to reserve to it the post of sports leader - Chairman of the Committee on

Physical Culture and Sport. In the period 1952-73, therefore, the Socialist W. Reczek was Chairman, while the Socialist Jan Mulak headed the Track and Field Federation after 1947. Such non-communists were able to focus Polish sport more on patriotism than internationalism; while paying lip service to the Soviet model, they did their best to retain as many Polish elements in the system as possible - which is why the Polish Olympic Committee received such generous support from Poles abroad. Poland also managed to preserve semi-independent national sports clubs and groups, like the Polish Peasant Sports Federation and Catholic sports clubs like Marathon (not concerned with running marathons); such independent sports groups were unimaginable in the Soviet Union and some other states. After 1956, when a number of national communists with their leader Gomulka were released from prison, national sports policy received more official support.

The lack of Western understanding of this 'nationalist v. internationalist' battle within sports systems still rankles with some East Europeans. They also resent the lack of support for persecuted and dissident athletes. Liponski again:

In all cultural areas except sport East European dissidents could count on Western solidarity and help. Not in sport. Every artist, writer or scientist who criticized or opposed the communist regime could automatically expect at least verbal solidarity; now and again, such people were liberated and allowed to emigrate after the intervention of colleagues in the West. This never (never, never!) happened in sport. The West needed Soviet and East European competition and no one was bold enough to do anything against the sports policy of communist regimes.⁸

Liponski can speak from experience. In 1968, he was sacked from his university for refusing to join the Communist Party which had wanted him to be a 'model' young scholar, being an eminent sports star - much needed after the March 1968 youth rebellion. For five years he was without work, being on the official 'black list', and lived in abject poverty. 'Where were my sports colleagues then?' he asks.⁹

Such examples are legion throughout Eastern Europe. It was not only Western sports scholars, athletes and journalists who keep silent. What pro-

test did the IOC make about the shooting of its Estonian members by the secret police, or the persecution of Baltic Olympians who refused to compete under the Soviet flag after 1952? Or the many known flagrant violations of the Olympic Charter by communist regimes (e.g. in regard to the payment and full-time training of Olympic athletes)?

It is important to understand, then, that success in sport for East European states and athletes has a complex background and cannot be put down simply to advantages accorded by the communist system. Long after the last rites have been read over the communist body, the national element will remain; in fact, with the splitting of the nine East European states into some 35 and upwards sovereign powers, and as ethnic conflicts and tensions mount, the national factor in sport seems destined to accord sport relatively high priority in terms of international performance.

What are the likely implications for the Olympic movement of communism's demise?

With the change-over from a centrally planned to a free market economy, from collective to individual values, from idealism to materialism, the consequences for sport in the one-time communist states are inevitably profound.

First of all, the state is withdrawing its support for sport and the economic privileges given to the sporting elite. As a result, athletes, teams and federations are having to seek sponsors and the highest bidders for their spectacle and talents. This has meant the virtual bankruptcy of non-profitable spectacle sports (especially Olympic disciplines like fencing, yachting, equestrianism, waterpolo and most winter sports, excluding ice hockey). A major dilemma is that the private sponsorship of sport is still in its infancy and, given the perilous state of economies, is quite incapable of taking over the funding abandoned by the state. In Poland, the sports assignments from the state budget were slashed by 43 percent in 1991, and in Russia and other ex-Soviet states, the cuts have been even greater; in addition, the sports residential schools have shut down, the trade unions, armed and security forces have all withdrawn their support for sport. The major sponsor to take their place is ... the mafia.

Second, post-communist sport in Eastern Europe cannot achieve any real and lasting reforms without

virtually cutting itself off from global sport and its uncompromising demands for performance. The international market for athletic talent has enabled stars from erstwhile communist states to become entrepreneurs who offer themselves for sale to promoters around the world. Basketball and ice hockey players and coaches find a home in the USA, soccer stars and cyclists in Europe, boxers and weightlifters in Japan. Others, as in tennis and track and field, become international entrepreneurs, virtually stateless and part of a world jetsetting circuit. It is not just athletes. At the 1988 Seoul Olympics, as many as 32 top Polish coaches were employed by non-Polish national teams. It is estimated that in 1993 some 180 Polish coaches, formerly employed at national team level in Poland, worked abroad, as did over a thousand sports instructors.¹⁰ The emigration of East German sports medical experts (particularly in doping) is well documented and is on the same dangerous footing as the exodus of Soviet nuclear scientists prepared to sell their services to the highest bidder. Communist incentives, then, have been replaced by market incentives that promote elite sport as effectively as state apparatchiks once did.

Third we have already noted the enduring power of sports nationalism. Each of the 'new' nations in Eastern Europe is eager to put itself on the map and be seen (with flag, anthem, logo and politicians) at international sporting events in the full glare of world publicity. Although economies may be in the doldrums for some time to come, the momentum developed by the new nation states is taking them into all manner of competitions which state budgets are totally incapable of supporting.

Fourth, for decades East European Athletes were isolated from the outer world politically and economically. Despite all the ideological pressures, sport became one of the most attractive ways for young people to travel and enjoy some of the benefits of consumer societies in the West. These benefits were usually apportioned in relatively small amounts. In the early years, communist teams were guarded by plain-clothes security officers and 'politruks' - political educators responsible for the political behaviour of athletes abroad. One factor was fairly constant: athletes were always kept short of money. Often the state authorities retained all revenue and earnings, sometimes they granted part of the money to athletes involved in generating the cash. This tended to produce the 'trading athletes'

who bartered scarce items (tins of caviar, watches, cameras, champagne) for Western currency.

This background has to be understood to appreciate the present 'hunger' for security, for Western comforts, for a 'fast buck'. With the economic situation at home fairly dire (worse than under communism) and the withdrawal of the economic privileges that elite athletes had always taken for granted, the sports stars from Eastern Europe are now desperately trying to compensate for their losses by exploring (and exploiting) the Western sports market. The methods take the form of tough bargaining for royalties, mass emigration to 'promised lands' and threats to withhold participation. Such was the case with several Russian soccer players during the World Cup: because they did not succeed in forcing out the team coach and obtaining more money than offered for their services, they simply refused to play for their country (the 'greed' overcame all consideration of playing, for the one and only time in their lives for most of them, in the world's foremost soccer competition). They had no thought of a patriotic pride in playing for their country.

A further complication in commercial terms is caused by the current sports administration and the ongoing battle for control. Seeing the inevitable end to their political power, a number of communist officials quickly turned themselves into businesspeople and, using their influence and contacts, purchased state firms at very low prices (about 20 percent of their real value) under the cover of privatisation. These became known as 'nomenklatura' companies. They were soon joined by similar companies formed by members of the new political elite (Solidarity in Poland, Sajudis in Lithuania, Yeltsinites in Russia, etc.). Both soon accumulated excess wealth and, wishing to strengthen their public image, turned to sports sponsorship. Like the primitive capitalism that underlies their power, the methods used to promote commercial sport are often primitive in the extreme, so relegating long-term overall sports promotion to starvation level.

On the one hand, therefore, we have an over-commercialised attitude towards profit-making among individual athletes and sports organizations hungry for money and prepared to forego moral principles to obtain it; on the other, at the level of sponsorship, there is gross under-commercialization, insufficient even for sport's minimal needs. As Liponski writes of Polish sport, 'The severe economic crisis, added

to clashes between the old and new power, the old and new power elite, keep Polish (and, I think, East European as well) sport much below the level of commercialization which in the West is commonly recognized as harmful to sports morality.”¹¹

Conclusions

The inheritors of the sports system that evolved during the communist years seem bent on turning the old state system into one modelled on the West. With public support nourished on a reaction to the communist past, the ‘Westernisers’ are being aided by Western governments and institutions eager to see the old communist states join the ‘civilized’ world, abandon socialism, central planning and social provision.

It is possible that sport in Eastern Europe will become a hybrid of the worst of both worlds, retaining the bureaucracy of the old and adding only the exploitation, corruption and over-commercialization of some aspects of Western sport. The final product may well not inspire admiration, particularly seen in the mirror of Olympic ideals.

The advances of primitive capitalism - albeit a transitional period whose end is not yet in sight - are expected to turn the pecking order in international sport upside down. If this is true, then Western countries will catch up at the Olympics, while the ex-communist countries will soon dominate those professional sports which feature so prominently in the interests of Western industry and the media. One should not be surprised, therefore, to see the USA

run away with the medals at the Atlanta Olympics, while a Russian becomes world heavyweight boxing champion, an east German world tennis number one and an Uzbek winner of the Tour de France.

SOURCES

1. Editorial in Kultur i zhizn, 1 November 1949, 11, 5.
2. Fidel Castro, Quoted in S. Castanes (ed), Fidel. Sobre el deporte (el Deporte, Havana, 1974), 37.
3. Otto Schmidt, Sport in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Bonn, 1975), 12-13.
4. See Lou Dapeng, quoted in Iain Macleod, ‘Life of extreme hardship lies behind China’s revolution in athletics,’ Telegraph Sport, 18 October 1993, 44.
5. John Hoberman, ‘Sport and political ideology in the post-communist age,’ Paper presented at a conference on ‘The Changing Politics of Sport,’ University of Warwick, Coventry, England, 10-12 January 1992, 6.
6. Gunnar Paal, ‘Increasing Olympic enthusiasm in Estonia,’ Paper presented at the International Symposium ‘Sport...Le Troisieme Millenaire,’ Quebec City, 20-25 May 1990, 2.
7. Wojciech Liponski, personal communication, 18 March 1994.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Wojciech Liponski, ‘Will East meet West?’ GAA Coaching, 3, 2, 1993, 29.
11. Ibid., 30.