

The Central Army Sports Club (TsSKA) Forging a Military Tradition in Soviet Ice Hockey*

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The Central Army Sports Club of Moscow, best known to Soviet citizens by its abbreviation TsSKA (*Tsentral'nyi sportivnyi klub armii*), is arguably the most prestigious sporting organization in the USSR. TsSKA and its organizational forerunners have been at the leading edge of Soviet sport virtually since the formation of the Soviet Union in 1922. Endowed by the armed forces with vast material and human resources, TsSKA has produced world class competitors in almost every Olympic sport but has achieved its greatest success in ice hockey, fielding a team that has dominated domestic competition and had a startling impact on international play.

The extraordinarily rich athletic history of TsSKA owes not a little to the fact that the tradition of sport in the Soviet Union is inextricably linked with the development of the armed forces. Indeed, from the imposition of conscription in 1918, a principal function of organized sport in the soviet state has been to prepare young men and women physically and morally for the purpose of building and defending socialism. Standing at the pinnacle of the military sports hierarchy, TsSKA early assumed a position of influence which to this day confers upon it extraordinary advantages and responsibilities. Since World War Two, the TsSKA ice hockey team has forged a tradition of excellence that makes it a particularly potent symbol of success in a state that has in turn made a great commitment to athletic achievement. Spokesmen for the military and the club attest that the team's successes exemplify the essential virtues of good Soviet soldiers and communists, and by implication reflect favorably on the army and state.

TsSKA: Origins and Early Development

Imperial Russia did not leave a rich sporting legacy but athletic clubs existed in small numbers before the revolution for the benefit of the army and society's

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elite. Fencing gained popularity during the eighteenth century and gymnastics were included in the official program of the Cadet Corps in 1844.¹ Swimming captured a following around the same time. The establishment of universal military service in 1874 raised the civic awareness of Russia's gentry and prompted the spontaneous formation of popular "shooting-gymnastics" societies to school young men in skills that might make them better soldiers and officers. The new military system further necessitated increased attention to the physical fitness of ordinary conscripts. Whereas in the past the army filled its ranks almost entirely with peasants who were inured to physical hardships, it now drew upon all elements of society. The entry into the ranks of significant numbers of men from towns and cities, less accustomed to physical labor than their village counterparts, necessitated the lowering of fitness standards in the army after 1884. As a result, in 1898, the military moved to lend active support to voluntary sporting organizations so as to strengthen young men for future service.² Given such encouragement, Russia's nascent sporting movement progressed and bred competition in soccer, yachting, tennis, cycling and ice skating. In 1909, the prestigious Officers' General Gymnastic School opened in St. Petersburg to nurture physical culture and research. The last milestones in prerevolutionary sport were appearances by Russian delegations at the Olympic Games of 1908 and 1912 at which they garnered a modest number of medals. During the latter in Stockholm, a Russian won the shooting competition in the first Modern Pentathlon.³

In the maelstrom of revolution and civil war, the leadership of the fledgling Soviet state marshalled every resource in the struggle for survival, including organized sport. Accordingly, in April 1918, universal military training was instituted under the auspices of *Vsevobuch* (short for universal military training), which took over existing athletic facilities and made them available to men of or near service age. By the end of the year, according to official estimates, expansion of the system allowed almost two million men to complete a program of physical training and marksmanship. In 1922, the Revolutionary Military Soviet decreed that henceforth sport-gymnastics would be a standard element in training.⁴

Vsevobuch did not survive the first years of the New Economic Policy during which the Commissar of Education, Anatolii Lunacharskii, led an effort to purge sport of its bourgeois, or competitive, elements. In addition, the growing interest of the Communist Party and trade unions in the societal functions of

1. P. Stolpianskii, "Sport v starom Petrograde," *Voенно-istoricheskii sbornik* No. 3 (1914): 38-39 and A. D. Butovskii, "Upruhneniia i zaniatiia. imeiushchiiia otnoshenie k fizicheskomu vospitaniiu v nashikh kadetskikh korpusakh," *Voенnyi sbornik* No. 2 (1899): 372.

2. "Ob obrazovanii i razvitiu strelkovo-gimnasticheskikh obshchestv," *Voенnyi sbornik* No. 6 (1899): 341-43.

3. Henry W. Morton, *Soviet Sport: Mirror of Soviet Society* (New York: Collier Books, 1965), 156-60, James Riordan, "The USSR and the Olympic Games," *Stadion VI* (1981): 291-92; T. A. Lowe, "The Modern Pentathlon," *The Army Quarterly V* (October 1922 and January 1923): 342-51.

4. Morton, *Soviet Sport*, 160-61 and James Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 69-72. Morton and Riordan have pioneered the study of Soviet sport history in the West. See also F. I. Samoukov and S. Sinityn, "Razvitie osnov sovetskoi sistemy fizicheskogo vospitaniia v gody vosstanovleniia i rekonstruktsii narodnogo khoziatstva (1921-29)," in *Istoriia fizicheskoi kul'tury* (Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1956), 107.

sport spawned much debate and nourished the development of a broad-based “physical culture” movement outside the control of the armed forces. However, Stalin’s rise to power brought a renewed emphasis on competition and the militarization of organized sport. The establishment of the forerunner of the modern DOSAAF (Voluntary Society for Support of the Army, Aviation and the Fleet—*Dobrovol’noe obshchestvo sodeistviia Armii, Aviatсии i Flotu*) in 1927 heralded the spread of civil defense programs in schools across the country. Subsequently, in 1931, the state founded the GTO program (Ready for Labor and Defense—*Gotov k trudu i oborone*) with a focus on competitive sport but also stressing skills applied in warfare such as the grenade throw and marksmanship.⁵

Athletic programs thrived within the army as well. TsSKA dates its founding to a 29 April 1923 soccer (*futbal*) match involving the team of the VsevoBuch Experimental-Demonstration Center in Moscow. Such events flourished under the leadership of Mikhail Frunze, Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs, who asserted in 1925 that the Red Army must employ sport to achieve a revolution in the personal characteristics of the individual soldier. Unlike the old Russian army, he argued, the Red Army recognized the importance of mobility and maneuver, which in turn required more capable men. Frunze and Sergei Kamenev, who became Deputy Commissar in 1927, believed strongly in the value of competitive team sports as psychological preparation for combat. Coupled with a desire to uphold the prestige of the army, this conviction inspired the aggressive development of unit, district and all-armed forces teams in soccer, equestrian events, gymnastics, basketball, team handball and other sports.⁶ In 1928, the Central House of the Red Army, or TsDKA (*Tsentral’nyi dom krasnoi armii*) assumed charge of the organization of sport in the army and the First Workers’ Spartakiad took place in Moscow. Gymnast G. Baklanov, a future general and Hero of the Soviet Union, earned acclaim as an “Outstanding Athlete of the USSR.”⁷

In October 1929, the Revolutionary Military Council directed that every soldier participate in the sports program but with the increasing popularity of district and national championships, the nurturing of elite competitors commanded ever greater resources at the expense of mass participation. An identical trend prevailed within civilian sports clubs. By 1936, critics decried not only disproportionate investment in the exploits of a few top athletes but the spread of abuses such as improper cash bonuses for outstanding performances and efforts by some clubs to entice competitors from rival organizations. Still, the

5. Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, pp. 74, 85, 94-100, 139. For a succinct commentary on the enduring principles of DOSAAF, see “Shtaby GO i komitety DOSAAF,” *Soverskii patriot*, 13 January 1985.

6. Mikhail Frunze, “Rech’ tov. Frunze na zakrytii sostiazanii na pervenstvo RKKA i flot.” *Krasnaia zvezda*, 25 August 1925 and S. Kamenev, “Fizicheskaia podgotovka i sport v krasnoi armii,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, 16 September 1925. For comment on the development of sport, see V. Kal’bus, “Krasnoarmeiskii sport letom,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, 7 July 1925 and K. Akulov, “Uchet fizpodgotovki,” *Krasnaia zvezdu*, 3 August 1925. Akulov is among the first to find fault with the emphasis on elite teams as opposed to mass participation. For a useful contextual discussion of Frunze’s aims, see Mark van Hagen, “School of the Revolution: Bolsheviks and Peasants in the Red Army, 1918-1928” (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1984), I: 411.

7. M. G. Shlaen, *TsSKA* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1983), 4-5 and Riordan, *Sport*, 139-40.

frenzied quest for victories and rewards persisted. The growth of sport in the armed forces withstood the turmoil of Stalin's purges and, in 1939, army teams laid claim to All-Union titles in weightlifting, skiing and ball hockey.*

The marked rise of army athletics and the general militarization of sport in society at large under Stalin seized the attention of a British military observer, Lieutenant Colonel Graham Seton Hutchinson, in 1937.

The focus of all sport is the Red Army itself. It has the most luxurious sports grounds and, in addition to drills and specialized training, the private has several hours of each day in which he must take part in some form of sport without supervision. Officers are obliged to have capacity in some form of athletics or sport. . . .⁹

To be sure, the Soviet Union was not the only state to regiment sport on a grand scale and emphasize its military applications-Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany did so as well-but it was the first. Despite important differences in governing ideology, all three states possessed sweeping power to mobilize youth, as they did every other resource, in pursuit of national objectives. By comparison, Britain's Physical Training and Recreation Act of 1937, a government program to encourage physical activity, was a modest and ineffective endeavor.¹⁰ Sport in the Soviet Union carried on even through the terrible years of the Great Patriotic War (1941-45) and most athletes found themselves in combat units where many fought with distinction. After the war, TsDKA (then briefly known as TsDSA, *Tsentral'nyi dom soverskoi armii*) athletes emerged as the pre-eminent faction of the first Soviet Olympic Team, accounting for one third of the delegation that visited Helsinki in 1952. The next year the Ministry of Defense effected yet another reorganization and established the Central Sporting Club of the Ministry of Defense, or TsSKMO (*Tsenfral'nyi sportivnyi klub Ministerstva oborony*), which in turn became TsSKA in 1960.¹¹

Since their Olympic debut, athletes of the Central Army Sports Club have become known world-wide and their exploits have been duly publicized in the Soviet Union both to bolster the image of the army and inspire Soviet youth. In recent years, athletes of TsSKA have been the leading standard bearers for the Soviet Union in the most public arena of competition among states, international sport. As of 1984, 264 armed forces athletes, a large majority of whom trained at the TsSKA complex in Moscow, had garnered gold medals in Olympic competition. Among rival sports organizations in the USSR, the closest pursuers were Dinamo athletes with 167 gold medals, followed by Burevestnik with 123 and Spartak with 111.¹²

8. Riordan, *Sport*, 132-35 and Morton, *Soviet Sport*, 144-45.

9. Graham Seton Hutchinson, "Manpower and Defense: European 'Sports' Policies-Britain's Problem," *The Army Quarterly* XXXIII, No. 2 (1937): 212. For a good general discussion of the army's role in the transmission of social values, see Ellen Jones, *Red Army in Society: A Sociology of the Soviet Military* (Winchester, Ma.: Allen & Unwin, 1985).

10. Hutchinson, "Manpower and Defense," 210 and Stephen Jones, "State Intervention in Sport and Leisure in Britain between the Wars," *Journal of Contemporary History* 22 (January 1987): 166-67.

11. Shlaen, *TsSKA*. 5.

12. These figures are compiled on the basis of data published by B.N. Khavin, *Vse o soverskikh Olimpiitsakh* (Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1985). Khavin provides a medal summary for each summer and winter Olympiad and notes the club origins of all Soviet winners.

By virtue of their high visibility and the passions they excite, athletes can play an influential role as symbols in modern societies. Whereas in the United States athletes command large fees for commercial endorsements, in the Soviet Union they lend their prestige first to the state and then to their sponsoring organization. The official newspaper of the Soviet Army, *Krasnaia zvezda* (Red Star), and other publications such as *Sovetskoe voennoe obozrenie* (Soviet Military Review), seldom miss a chance to highlight the successes of Soviet athletes and to relate them to virtues long exhibited on the battlefield by Soviet soldiers. In the words of one Soviet officer, "Sport in the army is a means to heighten the men's fighting ability. While training for these norms, the men acquired stamina, strength and they became ready to cope with all the rigors of a fighting man's career."¹³ Of paramount importance is the molding of the character of individuals through athletic competition. When teams of TsSKA excel, their success is typically attributed to the simple (and almost universally recognized) collectivist virtues of selfless play, iron dedication and tireless preparation.¹⁴

Popular histories of the Great Patriotic War and the pages of military publications are replete with accounts of Soviet fighting men whose heroic feats can be traced to their experience in sport. Their ranks include representatives of many sports: soccer players such as N. Biazii, who became a general, A. Ladychek, and I. Kuzmenko; hockey stars N. Sologub and Iu. Tarasov; the boxer, Sergei Shcherbakov; the champion ski jumper, Victor Kharchenko; the marathoner, N. Kopylev; and weight lifter N. Shatov,¹⁵ to name but a few. These and other paragons of patriotic devotion and courage are officially revered and upheld as shining models for all Soviet youth. For example, a 1983 account in *Krasnaia zvezda* described the wartime deeds of Alexander Kanaki. According to the story, on the very day the war began Kanaki earnestly informed his commander that the moment had come for him, like thousands of other top army athletes, to repay the motherland for all her concern. Later, in the heat of battle at Stalingrad, Kanaki ignored two bullet wounds, rushed an enemy machine gun emplacement, and with the last of his strength hurled a grenade into the nest. Following the war, Kanaki established a Soviet record in the hammer throw and, his enshrinement in the pantheon of Soviet legends assured, retired with a total of sixteen national championships.¹⁶

As the modern basis for the physical development of the average soldier, the army founded the so-called military-sports complex (*voenno-sportivnyi*

13. V. Tulpo, "Sports and Combat Training," *Soviet Military Review* No. 6 (1967): 63.

14. P. S. Stepovoi, *Sport: politika-ideologija* (Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1984), 21-24. See also I. Tabunov, "Masters of Football," *Soviet Military Review* No. 9 (1970): 62 and the portraits of Soviet hockey stars in I. Gorianov, *Rytsari ataki* (Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1983).

15. A. Chanyshev, "TsSKA-50 let," *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal* No. 4 (1973): 125-26; "Shei mal'chishkam v tu poru," *Futbol-Khokkei* No. 19 (1985); V. Pakhomov, "Kharakter zashchitnika," *Futbol-Khokkei* No. 19 (1985); Iu. Kostinskii, "Futbol'noe pole-pole boiia," *Sovetskii sport*, 18 April 1985; Lieutenant Colonel P. Rostovtsev, "Athletes in War," *Soviet Military Review* No. 4 (1981): 62-64.

16. "Ognennye stadiony," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 27 April 1983. Some books on the war have focused exclusively on the role of athletes. A splendid example is V. M. Gankvich's *V boiakh i sporte* (Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1985).

kompleks) in 1965. In 1973, the program rules stipulated that a soldier must be proficient in unarmed attack and defense, take part in competition in a minimum of five Olympic events, and train in the exercises of the pentathlon, among them tasks in swimming, running and skiing, as well as pull-ups.¹⁷ Faith in the applicability of such training is evident in the remarks of Major General N. Koshelev, Chairman of the Sports Committee of the USSR Ministry of Defense, who in 1972 pointed to his own wartime experiences of 1941. Koshelev noted proudly how his men prevailed in hand-to-hand combat, adding, "That was no accident because next to their battle decorations they proudly wore the GTO badge."¹⁸

The Central Army Sports Club of Moscow has become a logical beneficiary of official emphasis on the lessons of sport and their relevance to national defense. As the foremost athletic ambassadors of the army, with the club's extensive resources at their disposal, sportsmen of TsSKA have not merely the aim but the duty to excel. According to V. Gromov, a commentator for *Sovetskii sport*, "In the propagandizing of our country in physical culture, in the strengthening of the authority of Soviet sport, in the attraction of youth to activity in stadiums, pools and gyms the 'armeitsy' see their duty."¹⁹ By almost any measure, they have met their obligation. To insure continued success, the club operates twenty specialized youth sports schools with a total enrollment of about 5,000.²⁰ Past stars of Soviet sport are commonly employed as trainers, lending their prestige to the institution and serving as examples for their charges.

For men in active service, the Soviet Army maintains a regular sports program and organizes competitions across the country. In principle, outstanding performers from such events form the core of the teams representing TsSKA. In reality, in well-developed team sports such as hockey or basketball, only those athletes with long years of training, ordinarily in special schools, possess the ability and skill necessary to make the flagship teams of the army. The word "army" (*armii*) in Russian embraces ground forces, strategic rocket forces, air defense forces, and air forces and they are appropriately represented in the army sports organization. TsSKA holds center stage, and controls most of the best athletes, but the army also maintains a major sports club (*sportivnyi klub armii* or SKA) in each of the sixteen military districts of the Soviet Union in cities such as Leningrad, Sverdlovsk or Khabarovsk. Special training in certain aquatic sports is available in Moscow at the Central Naval Sports Club or TsSK VMF (*Tsentral'nyi sportivnyi klub Voennno-morskogo flota*). The TsSKA complex in Moscow features as complete an array of facilities as can be found anywhere in the Soviet Union, including an array of playing fields, a gym-

17. A. Tikhmirov, "Military Sports Complex," *Soviet Military Review* No. 1 (1974): 63-64.

18. N. Koshelev, "Stages of Health, Strength and Courage," (an interview with Major General N. Koshelev), *Soviet Military Review* No. 9 (1972): 63-64. For additional comment on the importance of physical fitness to national defense, see Stepovoi, *Sport*, 21-24.

19. B. Gromov, "Sila-v preemstvennosti pokolenii," *Sovetskii sport*, 15 April 1983.

20. Shlaen, TsSKA, 55.

nasium, track and football stadiums, centers for weight-lifting and equestrian competition, tennis courts, a shooting range, and an ice rink.²¹

Forging a Tradition in Ice Hockey

Though the triumphs of TsSKA span a broad spectrum of sporting endeavors, it is the ice hockey team above all that has set a standard of superior achievement. V. D. Sysoev, historian of the TsSKA hockey club, writes, ‘The team TsSKA to date has no equal, either in domestic or international hockey.’²² However brash such a claim, the fact remains that the record of TsSKA hockey is one of meteoric rise and almost uninterrupted success.

Ice hockey, though not unknown in the Soviet Union before 1940, began to develop rapidly after the war. The effort, spearheaded by TsSKA, began virtually from scratch, without a pool of skilled coaches or proven players. In fact, a number of early stars, such as Vladimir Nikanorov, first captain of the army club, had already distinguished themselves as soccer players.²³ Nevertheless, with official blessing and the participation of recognized sports figures who gave credibility to the effort, the first USSR championship season got underway on December 22, 1946.²⁴ In February 1948, a Czech team visited the Soviet Union to assist the Soviet teams and give them a taste of outside competition. After winning several training matches with Dinamo Moscow and the team of the Air Force (*Voенно-vozdushnye sily*), the Czechoslovaks played a series with the Moscow all-star team (*sbornaia*) resulting in a win, a loss and a tie for each side.²⁵

The evolution of the Soviet national hockey program was closely interwoven with that of TsSKA. Anatolii Tarasov, a hard taskmaster and a fervent patriot, assumed the helm as the player-coach of the army club of Moscow in 1947.²⁶ Three years later, Tarasov published the first Soviet textbook on ice hockey. Affirmation of his theories came swiftly as his army squads stormed to consecutive national titles and the national team, under Tarasov’s direction, stunned international observers by capturing the World Amateur Championship in 1954.²⁷ Tarasov’s control of Soviet hockey fortunes increased in 1953 with the decision to merge TsDSA with the rival club of the Air Force under the title TsSK MO. With the nucleus of the Soviet National Team under his full-time control, Tarasov sought to sharpen his players’ skills and refine his own tactics against North American competition. In 1957, the Soviets performed well against a number of leading Canadian amateur clubs but evoked more curiosity than respect among their hosts for whom professional hockey repre-

21. Tabunov, “Masters of Football,” 64. Still, many American universities have better overall facilities.

22. V. D. Sysoev. *Igraet TsSKA* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1982), 4.

23. *Ibid.*, 7-12.

24. V. N. Pakhomov, *35 let sovetskogo khokkeia* (Moscow: Moskovskaia pravda, 1981), 3.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 10 and Sysoev. *Igraet TsSKA*, 13-14.

26. I had the opportunity to talk with Tarasov before the final game of the 1981 Canada Cup Tournament in Montreal.

27. Sysoev, *Igraet TsSKA*, 8 and Grigorii Mkrtychan, “U istokov khokkeinoin slavy,” (as interviewed by B. Siniavskii), *Sportivnaia zhizn’ Rossii* No. 2 (1984): 22-23.

sented a much superior level of play. Still, Tarasov had passed an important milestone in piloting Soviet hockey to the top.²⁸

Tarasov returned to Canada with the national team in 1964 for a definitive test of its mettle against the legendary Montreal Canadiens of professional hockey and his squad acquitted itself well in defeat. From that moment, Tarasov looked ahead to a day when his players would be able to defeat the best of the professionals. Indeed, years later he concluded that he had overrated the level of play in the National Hockey League, presuming naively that all professional goaltenders played to the same standard as Montreal's famed Jacques Plante.²⁹ Tarasov believed that his players had already achieved parity in other aspects of the game and, with the discovery of a gifted young goalie in the person of Vladislav Tretiak, he was able to prove his case in the 1970s.

By 1972, Tarasov felt his team was ready to challenge the best of professional hockey on equal terms and the Hockey Federation agreed to a series of eight contests between the Soviet National Team and a squad of National Hockey League stars. The encounter was among the most dramatic and intriguing in the history of modern international sport. Soviet hockey risked its prestige, buoyed to that point by a string of Olympic and world amateur crowns, in an arranged meeting of the best teams that two rival systems, two mutually exclusive realms of competition—East European “amateurs” and North American professionals—could assemble.³⁰ Tarasov, having resigned as national team coach over a dispute with federation officials, was reduced to the status of observer but could take just pride in the outcome.³¹ The Soviet team comfortably accepted the role of underdog while the professionals, as they generally admitted after the series, complacently expected a walkover. In the end, the NHL stars barely prevailed, capturing four victories to three for the Soviet Union, an eighth game ending in a draw.

The USSR lost the series but won over the skeptics. They not only impressed the Canadians with the virtuosity of their play but introduced an innovative style of attack. The Soviet players exhibited extremely fast skating, superior con-

28. *Sysoev, Igraet TsSKA. 21-23; Dink Carroll, “Russians worked, waited for big hockey chance,” The Gazette (Montreal). 30 December 1975; and Robert Baumann, “From Russia with Love,” Goal X, No. 7 (1982-83): 31.*

29. Anatolii Tarasov, “Khokkei griadushchego,” *SDKA sportivnoe obozrenie No. 1*(1980): 30.

30. The status of Soviet “amateurs” has long been a subject of controversy. Notwithstanding the fact that Soviet athletes in theory are full-time workers, students or soldiers, all top Soviet athletes devote themselves principally to development in their chosen sport and earn incomes and privileges on the basis of their position as sportsmen. Thus the main differences between Soviet hockey players in the Elite League and their North American counterparts lie in the scale of earnings and the greater opportunity (somewhat curtailed since the collapse of the WHA) of the latter to market their talents to the highest bidder. This is not to say, however, that the line between amateurs and professionals has not been badly blurred in the West. The earnings of “amateur” track and field athletes, for example, have reached stellar proportions. “Big-time” college athletics in the United States has become a chiefly commercial venture and the “athletic scholarships” (ignoring for the moment payments by “boosters” outside the rules) constitute a form of service contract. Recently, the Soviets themselves have begun to reconsider the merits of professional sport in the official press.

31. Yuri Brokhin. *The Big Red Machine* (New York: Random House, 1980), 187-88. According to Brokhin, an emigre who apparently was well-connected with the Soviet hockey establishment, Tarasov demanded an unusually large bonus after leading the Soviet team to a gold medal in the 1972 Olympiad. Federation officials refused and invited Tarasov to resign. Brokhin's account is plausible but in his book he is occasionally prone to hyperbole. Soviet sources do not discuss the matter.

ditioning and intricate passing skills to implement a carefully synchronised pattern of play that stood in sharp contrast to the more extemporaneous, yet predictably individualistic, approach of the North Americans. The outcome was widely seen as a validation of the “Soviet school” of hockey, a triumph reaffirmed when the Soviet National Team decisively outplayed a collection of stars from the infant World Hockey Association (a short-lived rival to the NHL) in 1974. Tretiak, who performed superbly, summed up the result this way:

The games played in the arenas of Canada and Moscow weren't simply between two hockey teams; they were between two different styles of hockey. We won and I think that proves that our style of hockey is more up-to-date, contemporary.³²

In addition, at least as the leaders of the Soviet sporting establishment viewed matters, the victory confirmed the relevance of collectivist virtues to competition. As Tretiak put it, “We displayed the best qualities of Soviet sportsmen: team play, devotion, unity and will to win.”³³

Of course, given their claim to amateur status, Soviet sportsmen officially maintain that their most important victories are realized in Olympic and world amateur competition. With the exceptions of the American upset triumphs in 1960 and 1980, the Soviet Union has won every Olympic hockey championship since 1956 and has taken twenty world amateur titles since 1954.³⁴ Still, since the late 1970s they have competed almost annually against North American professionals. Despite the charges of Western critics that the circumstances of such competition—the Soviet Union is said to maintain a national team whereas all-star squads from the National Hockey League must be assembled on an ad hoc basis—have always favored the Soviets,³⁵ the prestige of Soviet hockey has climbed steadily. At home as well, Soviet citizens are more likely to cite victories over the professionals as evidence of their superiority than their bundle of amateur titles.³⁶

There can be little dispute that the success of the Soviet National Team depended directly on the development of TsSKA, which Tarasov guided to eighteen USSR championships from 1948 to 1975. Tarasov's TsSK MO squad won four national championships from 1955 through 1959, including a flawless (28-0) campaign in 1956 in which they outscored their opposition 207 goals to 29. TsSKA captured a national crown in 1961 without Tarasov at the helm but a

32. Vladislav Tretiak. *The Hockey I Love* (Westport, Ct.: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1977), 107.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Viktor Tikhonov, *Khokkei: nadezhdy, razocharovaniia, mechty* (Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1985), 152-53. During the course of the 1981 Canada Cup Tournament, I interviewed Iurii Korolev, a hockey specialist at the Moscow Institute of Physical Culture. *Korolev* maintained that world amateur championships are the most important (along with the Olympics) competitions from the Soviet point of view but admitted that he could understand why North American observers would view events such as the Canada Cup as more significant.

35. Each time professional all-star teams from North America take on the Soviet National Team, a chorus of critics questions the wisdom of risking the NHL's prestige in an unequal contest. Complaints about Soviet referees have not been uncommon. Even so, the professionals have prevailed as often as not.

36. Even the Soviet press is gradually treating encounters with professionals as events of great importance, rivalling, though not surpassing, the world and Olympic championships. The victories of which the Soviets are most proud are a 6-0 demolition of the NHL All-Stars in the decisive game of the 1979 Challenge Cup and an 8-1 conquest of Team Canada in the finale of the 1981 Canada Cup Tournament.

sputtering performance in 1962 necessitated his return.³⁷ After Tarasov's final retirement, TsSKA endured a second-place finish in 1976 but has claimed every championship since.

Over the years, TsSKA has consistently laid claim to a disproportionate share of the nation's outstanding players, not infrequently by arranging the transfers of gifted performers from within the training systems of other clubs. Until recently, no formal rules governed player assignments and TsSKA shrewdly employed the lure of its vast resources and the leverage afforded by the system of universal military service to strengthen itself dramatically. Equally important, there has been apparent recognition on the part of the USSR Hockey Federation that the concentration of talent on one or several clubs in the Elite League (*vysshiaia liga*) serves the interests of Soviet hockey, or at least some of those interests. By maintaining combinations of crucial players on a few clubs, the federation insures that the national team will benefit from the fluidity and cohesiveness possible only when players have performed together for a long time. In other words, trios of forwards and pairs of defensemen can be sent to the national team intact, thus providing the Soviets with a meaningful edge over other (chiefly Western) countries whose players remain largely dispersed during their domestic seasons.³⁸

One unfortunate result of this practice has been a severe imbalance among teams in the Elite League. The recurring inability of other clubs to challenge TsSKA in recent years and to a lesser degree the domination of league play by the Moscow triumvirate of TsSKA, Dinamo and Spartak, has often been noted by Soviet specialists. A Leningrad hockey guide published at the start of the 1979-80 season contained blunt commentary on the problem.

Unfortunately, as before, there was no sham battle for medals (in 1978-79), and the stereotyped distribution of the top places was preserved. Specialists and experienced fans errorlessly named the top three teams before the start of the season, and this to a significant degree lowered fan interest in the tournament. Nevertheless, the concentration of young, talented players on one or two leading teams continues. The leaders of Soviet hockey justify this in the interests of the national team, and the better preparation of its reserve.³⁹

Under Tarasov, TsSKA did not take players from other clubs once they had reached the Elite League but did grab a number of younger, developing players (*polufabrikaty*) from other club systems. However, since Viktor Tikhonov assumed the helm of TsSKA and the national team in 1977, a number of outstanding players have joined the Moscow army club after making their debuts with other teams including the league's top scorer, Sergei Makarov, who left Traktor Cheliabinsk in 1978, and the brilliant Igor Larionov, who came from Khimik Voskresensk in 1981. In fact, in recent years TsSKA has recruited so many young players from Cheliabinsk that it is sometimes called "TsSKA-

37. Tarasov, "Khokkei griadushchego," 30; Sysoev, *Igraet TsSKA*, 30; V. Pakhomov, *Khokkei 81/82* (Moscow: Moskovskaia pravda, 1981), 79-81.

38. Tikhonov. *Khokkei*, p. 164. See also Baumann, "From Russia," 29-35.

39. *Khokkei, Khokkei 1979-1980* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1979), 3.

Traktor.”⁴⁰ As this fact suggests, one need not be an active member of the armed forces to enroll.

Thus year after year Soviet hockey authorities have been left to explain the absence of a strong competitive environment in their premier league. In 1979, Arkadii Chernyshev, himself a former coach of the national team, argued in favor of the system employed in Soviet soccer in which star players remain on the rosters of their original clubs but spend considerable time as part of the national team as well.⁴¹ After the 1983-84 campaign, in which TsSKA left all rivals far behind while losing only one game in forty-four, Spartak and Dinamo, in particular, were singled out for public criticism. Even Tikhonov, who has yet to lose a league championship at TsSKA, complained, “They were obliged to compete with TsSKA, and for this they had to employ maximum commitment and discipline.”⁴² Anatolii Kostriukov, Administrative Director of the USSR Hockey Federation, expressed similar disapproval after the 1982-83 season, charging that Spartak had failed to fulfill its potential and that Dinamo had disappointed for the second straight year.⁴³ Yet another commentator, S. Kruzhkov, asserted in *Soverskii sport* in 1983 that although TsSKA always had outstanding players, during some years Spartak, Dinamo Moscow, and the Wings of the Soviets (Moscow) were endowed with comparable talent.⁴⁴ Repeated references to the failure of Spartak and Dinamo to press TsSKA for hockey leadership tacitly confirmed their role as “designated challengers” in the Elite League, that is clubs stocked with enough talent to place them on approximately the same competitive level as the Central Army Sports Club. Soviet hockey specialists have frequently stressed the need for intense competition in the Elite League to stimulate superior performance and tactical innovation.⁴⁵ However, development of the national team still heads the list of federation priorities.

As a result of popular dissatisfaction after the 1982-83 season, in which TsSKA won forty of forty-four games on the way to its seventh consecutive championship, the USSR Hockey Federation adopted modest changes. The Leningrad hockey guide for 1983-84 summarized the matter this way:

The main loss of last season—a palpable lowering of fan interest in hockey: some matches of the second half of the season attracted fewer than two hundred fans. This is a very dangerous tendency, and the leaders of Soviet hockey, supporting the opinion of fans and specialists, are taking concrete counter-measures.⁴⁶

40. Tarasov, “Khokkei griadushchego,” 31 and Iurii Van’iat, “S razocharovaniem is optimizmom,” *Sovetskii sport*, 10 May 1987.

41. *Khokkei, Khokkei*. 3.

42. V. Tikhonov, “Blagodarnia inertsia deistviia,” (interview with V. Tikhonov), *Futbal-khokkei* No. 7 (1984). Oleg Spasskii, conducting an interview with Tikhonov in “Khokkei prodolzhaetsia,” *Ogonek* No. 3 (1985): 28. was pleased to note that TsSKA actually lost an early game in the 1984-85 season, falling to Khimik. 4-3.

43. A. Kostriukov, “Igra proveriaet rabotu,” (interview with Anatolii Kostriukov) *Futbal-khokkei*. No. 50 (1983).

44. S. Kruzhkov, “Armeiskii kharakter,” *Sovetskii sport*. 26 April 1983.

45. Tarasov, “Khokkei griadushchego,” 31 and Robert Baumann and Bob Otto, “Back in the USSR,” *Hockey*, No. 3 (1981): 39.

46. *Khokkei ‘83-84* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1983), 3

The new rules limited the total number of player transfers among clubs in the Elite League to eight before the start of the 1983-84 season. In addition, clubs in the top circuit collectively took only a dozen stars from the so-called First League a notch below. The impact of these and subsequent measures, such as the adoption of an experimental playoff format in 1987-88, is not yet in evidence. Even the reduced level of player mobility did not prevent TsSKA from luring one or two key players per year from lesser clubs, about the same rate at which it had done so previously.

For individual athletes, transfer to Moscow brings the glamour and practical advantages of life in the Soviet Union's most modern city. In addition, athletes of TsSKA have enjoyed a comfortable sinecure during their playing years and the luxury of at least one attractive career option, that of a Soviet Army officer, when they give up sport. Members of other clubs have often had to accept jobs as coaches in remote locations if they have not trained for a second career.⁴⁷ In the meantime, the persistent ambiguity of official attitudes towards player transfers was reflected in an observation by writer V. S. Chicherov in *Sovetskii sport* in 1987.

No one can be against it if a capable lad, in accord with a dream of his youth, desires to transfer to TsSKA or Dinamo, his favorite clubs since childhood, but I am against enticement and dispatch to the army team by a directive from above.⁴⁸

In all, conditions continue to favor TsSKA, which has won thirty league championships in forty-one campaigns, winning 1,123 contests while suffering only 150 defeats and 88 ties through 1986-87.⁴⁹

Still, the unceasing dominance of TsSKA has brought redeeming advantages. Members of the triumphant army team have served the state well as propagandists. All recent squad members have joined the Komsomol (the Communist Youth League) and Tretiak, in particular, emerged as a visible spokesman for the organization. In his 1977 book on hockey, Tretiak wrote that before the third game of the series against the World Hockey Association All-Stars in Winnipeg, the squad held a Komsomol meeting at which they listened to stirring patriotic talks by Vladimir Petrov, the team's Komsomol organizer, and Boris Mikhailov, team captain. Tretiak's status as a national sports hero and role model may well have been a critical factor in the failure of the Montreal Canadiens hockey franchise to arrange the loan of his services after the Soviet Olympic triumph of 1984. The Canadiens had made it known in 1982 that they would welcome Tretiak to become the first Soviet hockey star to perform in the National Hockey League. In turn, the vaunted goalie himself expressed interest in such a possibility early in 1983, noting his warm feelings for the Montreal fans and the great tradition of the Canadiens franchise.⁵⁰

47. Riordan, *Sport*, 292 and Baumann and Otto, "Back in the USSR," 37. Of course, the military is not the only organization that has permitted its athletes to perform nominal duties while they train. Indeed, this has become a standard practice in all major clubs.

48. V. S. Chicherov, "Tol'ko po sovesti," (interview with V. S. Chicherov), *Futbal-khokkei*, No. 5 (1987).

49. N. Kiselev, *Khokkei 87-88* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1987), 87.

50. Tretiak, *The Hockey I Love*, 99 and E. M. Swift, "An Army Man to the Core," *Sports Illustrated*, 14

Speculation about an imminent agreement heightened in 1984 when word spread that Tretiak would retire after the Olympics and completion of the current season with TsSKA. Some precedents existed for Tretiak to play abroad. A few other Soviet stars upon retirement had received permission to play and coach in countries such as Austria and Japan but the temporary export of Tretiak to an NHL club would have been exceptional even in this context. As Tretiak, with a touch of ambivalence, summed up his status for an American journalist before the 1984 Winter Olympiad, "I cannot dispose of myself as I wish."⁵¹ To appear with North American professionals, who in the view of the Soviet sports hierarchy embodied tainted values contrary to the lofty ideal of amateurism (at least as interpreted in the USSR), would have been unacceptable. As V. Sysoev explained in *Igraet TsSKA*, a history of TsSKA hockey, athletes cannot forget that they represent their state and political system.

Hockey players not infrequently find themselves at the leading edge of ideological struggle. Abroad they sometimes find it necessary not only to demonstrate their sporting mastery but to appear in the role of ideological warriors, to give a decisive rebuff to the diversions of bourgeois ideology.⁵²

Tretiak's loan would possibly have compromised his position as an example for Soviet youth. Of course, the marked change in the international climate since 1984 and rapid reform in Soviet sport, in accord with the principles of *perestroika* (restructuring), may portend the opening for others of avenues which were closed to Tretiak.⁵³

In the meantime, Tretiak's retirement did not bring an end to TsSKA domination of Soviet hockey and membership on the national team. As of 1982, of 140 Soviet players who had appeared in world, European and Olympic championships, fifty-nine hailed from the Central Army Sports Club. Their nearest pursuers have been Dinamo Moscow with twenty-two representatives, the Wings of the Soviets with twenty-one, and Spartak with nineteen. The non-Moscow clubs collectively had contributed only twenty⁵⁴ and some of these either transferred to Moscow clubs or had already played for Moscow clubs until release late in their careers. More recently, TsSKA contributed twelve of twenty-two members of the 1984 Soviet Olympic hockey roster and fourteen of twenty-three members of the 1988 edition.⁵⁵

November 1983, 39-40. See also I. Kuprin, "Tsfiry kak otrazhenie," *Futbol-khokkei No. 11* (1987). Tretiak sounded more optimistic about the possibility of playing in Montreal in remarks to the press on 6 January 1983 after TsSKA routed the Philadelphia Flyers 6-1 during a North American tour.

51. Swift, "An Army Man," 38.

52. Sysoev, *Igraet TsSKA*, 127.

53. On the subject of current negotiations between the NHL and the Hockey Federation, see, for example, Steve Dryden, "NHL Anticipates Soviets Skating into the League," *The Hockey News*, No. 23 (1988): 16. One of the significant elements of reform in Soviet sport is experimentation with club self-financing or the reliance on revenues instead of state subsidies. The expansion of such a system may create pressures on clubs or the federations to find new ways to generate revenues and the loan of players abroad could be one such means. One club currently engaged in such a program is the Dinamo Kiev soccer club. See V. Lobanovskii, "Perekhodim na kbouaschet," *Izvestiia*, 22 March 1988 and Alexander Gorbunov, "To Score a Goal: Sport, Money, Personality," *Moscow News No. 11* (1988): 15.

54. Sysoev, *Igraet TsSKA* 171-72.

55. O. Spasskii, "Olimpiiskie geroi: portret sovremennika," *Sovetskii sport*, 2 March 1988 and V. Glod and E. Sushkevich, *Khokkei 1984/85* (Minsk: Polymia, 1984), 3.

TsSKA In the Public Eye

Notwithstanding the adulation showered on heroes such as Tretiak and widespread respect for the superior level of TsSKA hockey, the club has not won the popularity among Soviet fans that one would expect. Though there are no opinion polls to confirm it, observers of Soviet sport cannot mistake the fact that Moscow Spartak commands a vast following and consistently draws larger, more enthusiastic crowds to the Sports Palace. In the words of Iurii Brokhin, author of *The Big Red Machine*, "The Central Army Club . . . has the rinkside support of only a few strategically seated battalions, who utter not a sound unless authorized by their commanding officer."⁵⁶ Brokhin, an emigre, considerably overstates the case but TsSKA fans are without doubt more restrained than some others. Support for Spartak, typically coupled with opposition to TsSKA, seems to reflect a measure of popular rebelliousness against the monotony of the hockey status quo. Crowds in the Sports Palace (or in Lenin Stadium for soccer) commonly chant their approval of Spartak and, occasionally, their exasperation with TsSKA. A common refrain heard in Moscow goes, "All of Russia, all of Moscow, dislikes the Central Army Team." (*Vsia Rossia, vsia Moskva, preziraiut TsSKA!*)

Evidence of popular sentiments abounded in 1983 when Moscow was the scene of a graffiti war between the advocates of local clubs. The initials of Moscow teams could be found painted on bridges, sidewalks, walls and near metro stops across the city. The familiar "c" (Cyrillic "S") for Spartak, framed in a parallelogram to approximate the official club symbol, was ubiquitous. (In fact, on one occasion while climbing seven flights of stairs to visit a friend's apartment, this observer counted sixty-five Spartak signs in the stairwell.) At the same time, one here and there encountered "D" for Dinamo and occasionally the initials "TsSKA." Not infrequently, someone had rewritten the latter as "KONI," a word meaning horses, perhaps in mocking reference to bygone cavalry days, or even "MUSOR," meaning garbage. Official admonitions, repeated in the press, emanated from the Spartak society urging fans to cease defacing public property but with little immediate effect. Like most fads, this one ran its course and by 1984 such symbols were less noticeable in Moscow.

Perhaps frustrated hockey fans found solace in the miserable fortunes of the TsSKA soccer team. Though excelling in basketball, volleyball, track and field, marksmanship, skiing, figure skating, and chess, as well as hockey, army sportsmen have failed dismally in the most popular sport in the USSR, soccer, or football as it is known to Europe. Through forty-seven championship seasons TsSKA squads have managed to finish first a mere six times and, more serious, only once since 1951.⁵⁸ A dramatic turn for the worse in the army club's luck can be traced to events of the Fifteenth Summer Olympiad of 1952. The TsDKA football team had won five Soviet national titles during the preceding six years

56. Brokhin, *The Big Red Machine*, 176.

57. E. Rerikh, "Champion proiavil svoi armeiskii kharakter," *Sovetskii sport*. 22 March 1983.

58. *Futbal* (Moscow: 1984), 36.

and, supported by the intervention of military officials with the Soviet National Olympic Committee, came to form the nucleus of the Olympic team. The tournament schedule pitted the USSR against Yugoslavia at a time when relations between Stalin and Tito were chilled. In fact, Stalin was so concerned about the outcome that he telegraphed the team on the morning of the contest to remind the players that he expected victory. After the Soviet team lost 3-1, Stalin's displeasure resulted in the (temporary) dissolution of the TsDKA soccer team, the dispersal of its players to other clubs and the relief of coach V. Arkadev.⁵⁹ Success has been an infrequent visitor ever since. TsSKA ranked last in the Elite Soccer League for the 1984 season and thus had to accept relegation to a lower division. TsSKA has since returned to the highest level, only to be demoted again in 1988.

The inability of the TsSKA soccer team to assume a position of dominance, or even to challenge for national honors, is a puzzle to most Soviet fans, but several related causal factors suggest themselves. Since 1952, TsSKA has not enjoyed the special favor of the Football Federation. Further, although the federation has occasionally adopted a given club (as with TsSKA in 1952 or Dinamo Kiev on more recent occasions) to serve as the nucleus of a national team, it has not fostered the amassing of top talent by one or several clubs as in hockey. One practical obstacle to the concentration of the best players on Moscow clubs is the prominent role played by non-Russian players and teams in soccer. Nearly all top hockey players in the Soviet Union hail from the Russian Republic of the USSR. In contrast, soccer talent is widely distributed among the various republics and, although Russian players can be found on the roster of almost any team, many of the best players are non-Russian. Russian clubs, such as 1987 champion Spartak Moscow, have enjoyed success, but they have not been pre-eminent. Since 1965, Dinamo Kiev in the Ukraine has prevailed in the Elite League ten times. Other non-Russian clubs to seize national honors during the past two decades include Ararat (Armenia), Dinamo Minsk (Bielorussia), Dinamo Tbilisi (Georgia) and Dnepr (the Ukraine). Thus, whereas in hockey TsSKA can readily lay its hands on top performers from other clubs, -entailing a move within the Russian Republic-the recruitment of athletes from other Soviet republics is a complex task. A top Georgian player, for example, is hardly likely to transfer willingly to Moscow and, in any case, an effort by a Moscow club to hire top players from other republics would in some instances be viewed as attempted theft of a national treasure. Ethnic rivalries tend to have deep roots in soccer as anyone who has witnessed a contest between Dinamo Moscow and Dinamo Tbilisi, or Zenit Leningrad and Neftchi Baku, can attest.

All tribulations notwithstanding, TsSKA remains a formidable organization. Its phenomenal successes in hockey, as well as the training of national cham-

59. N. N. Romanov, *Trudnye dorogi k olimpu* (Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1987), 197-204. See also Morton, *Soviet Sport*, 181 and Brokhin, *The Big Red Machine*, 85.

pions and Olympic medalists in a host of other sports, have overshadowed a poor record in soccer.⁶⁰ TsSKA upholds the prestige of the army by fostering an aura of success and proficiency, and by serving as a constant reminder of the importance of physical fitness. For the Party, TsSKA serves as a pillar of the official values of the state. TsSKA athletes, with a few exceptions, are icons of victory at home and abroad, championing the virtues of collectivism and selfless devotion to the socialist motherland. Fittingly, in 1983, TsSKA opened a new museum on its Moscow premises filled with historical memorabilia extolling heroes and triumphs of the near and distant past. The "Club of Champions," as TsSKA is known among its supporters, reigns supreme in the minds, if not the hearts of most Muscovites. And, however much the success of the club in domestic competition-especially hockey-may be resented, all Soviet fans bask in the glory TsSKA athletes gain in international play.

60. Soccer may be the most popular sport in the USSR but no competition surpasses the excitement generated by the Olympics, in which not only the TsSKA hockey team but many other TsSKA athletes regularly shine. The comparative lack of success of Soviet soccer in international play has also probably helped obscure TsSKA's difficulties.