
KRUGER, ARND AND JAMES RIORDAN, eds., *The Story of Worker Sport* Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1996. Pp. vii+189. Notes, illustrations, appendices, index. \$35.00.

Despite a well-established tradition of working-class leisure and recreation, worker sport emerged as part of an oppositional, socialist movement culture with distinct political, social, and moral imperatives. From its inception, the worker sport movement vacillated between being a weapon in the international class war and a less politicized, healthy alternative for workers' leisure time. *The Story of Worker Sport* is a collection of ten essays (many translated into English for the first time) by sport and labor historians who discuss the rise and fall of worker sport in Europe, Scandinavia, the former Soviet Union, North America, and Israel.

The story begins with the mid-nineteenth century German Turners, who had organized 2,000 clubs with 168,000 members by the early 1860s. Foreshadowing trends in the twentieth century, the Turners split on both political ideology (between those who favored a constitutional monarchy and those who advocated democracy) and pragmatic visions of sport (between the well-rounded athlete and elite, specialized, competitive performance). Except for those pre-1900 sports clubs that were not linked to the labor movement or socialist politics, the early worker sport movement failed to spread much beyond Germany and Austria. Industrialized North America did not offer a receptive climate to worker sport, the ambitious efforts of Finns and Ukrainians notwithstanding. In Britain, although sport was a major working-class leisure activity, labor leaders and socialists regarded it with conspicuous antipathy.

This all changed dramatically as urbanization, accelerated industrial development, and migration broke down national barriers, laid bare the oppressive contradictions of modern life. As James Riordan discerns in his perceptive, well-written essay on Soviet worker sport, for much of Europe the Western model of sport as antidote to the urban crisis did not evolve until rather late relative to the rest of Europe and North America. Clubs and regulatory institutions had cropped up everywhere from the advanced capitalist heartlands of Britain to the industrial hinterlands of France and Finland. Despite its origin in industrialized, capitalist societies, the terms, conditions, and expectations for a worldwide worker sport movement were forever altered in underdeveloped Soviet Russia. In Russia, there was debate centered around whether or not bourgeois-tainted sport could be used to socialize mostly rural folks into the new Soviet state.

The debate about the direction that worker sport should take escalated in the 1920s between those who favored mass physical culture and those who

advocated competitive sport. Such debate merely reflected deeper political and social conflicts brewing throughout Western society as well as within communist and socialist circles. In 1921, the communist Red Sport International (RSI) was formed as an alternative to the social-democratic Lucerne Sport International. The vexing choice to join either the RSI or the LSI effectively split national organizations in all countries where worker sport had been established. In 1928, the contested ideological chasm within the worker sport movement was dramatized by the creation of Spartakiad, a two-week program dominated by Soviet athletes designed to showcase proletarian internationalism and counter-balance the bourgeois Amsterdam Olympics. In the ensuing years prior to the mid-1930s, the communists' class against class ideology branded social democratic reformist efforts as a reactionary liability to working-class interests. Despite a few noteworthy exceptions, most worker sport organizations neither competed with nor against each other.

The story of worker sport was fairly consistent throughout Europe. Bruce Kidd's excellent, theoretically informed historical analysis of worker sport in Canada provides a perceptive departure. By the 1920s, when the Workers' Sports Association of Canada was formed, most workers (like their comrades in the United States) had already been thoroughly integrated into the dominant bourgeois cultural establishment by employers, church leaders, and reformers as a way to reduce class and urban tension. Unlike in Europe where trade unions and socialist parties provided leadership and resources for an oppositional worker culture, in North America, such institutions left the terrain of leisure essentially uncontested.

The 1930s Popular Front era brought a semblance of resolution as communists ceased their ideological assaults on socialists for the good of the larger working-class revolution. Communists and socialists united in their opposition to the 1936 Berlin Games for obvious reasons. As Stephen Jones asserts in his deft study of the British scene, the communists came to see sport as a legitimate political issue and realized that they could no longer overlook workers' love of organized sport. 'Clearly, the political atmosphere of *'Class Against Class'* and the feeling that the revolution was just around the corner,' Jones writes, 'did not encourage a balanced perspective. It merely engendered a suspicion of reformism and a reluctance to consider non-Marxist developments, however advanced' (p. 110).

Popular Front initiatives ultimately ran up against the rise of fascism, which obstructed the possibility of creating a viable worker sport alternative for challenging the hegemony of bourgeois sport. In short, the worker sport movement stalled until after World War II (particularly in Germany and Austria) as social democrats scrambled to disassociate themselves from any taint of dissent from the Nazi regimes. The complex political quagmire effectively squelched all adversarial organizations including worker sport clubs.

The end of World War II brought about new challenges to the worker sport movement. The fascists were finally vanquished, but the way forward was riddled with uncertainty. The Soviets shifted gears. The flagship proletarian state was no longer interested in using sport as a vehicle for anti-bourgeois activism, and

rebuffed ideological loyalties to communist sports organizations abroad that interfered with the new Soviet foreign policy aims of good neighborliness, winning allies in the Third World, peaceful co-existence with capitalist countries, and Olympic superiority. European fellow travelers either fell in line with the new world order or vanished into nostalgic oblivion. Most existing worker sport movements ultimately embraced the competitive performance exigencies of what had previously been characterized as bourgeois sport (e.g., the Olympics) to achieve integration in post-World War II society, which sounded the death knell of nearly a century of worker sport.

This book has much to commend. It is superbly illustrated with over 100 photos and cartoons. Moreover, it features a comprehensive index and two appendices that highlight important dates of the Socialist Worker International and Red Sport International and brief summaries (compiled by Kruger) of the countries not covered in the books essays. Yet its awkward coffee-table size presents two columns of text per page; and although there are numerous, useful primary sources excerpted throughout, they often distract from the narrative. The national historical overviews prefacing each chapter have a dense, stand-alone appearance. Not only are they longer than an average monograph page, but the raw historical data might have been better integrated within the individual essays rather than treating the contextual material separately

This volume is a decidedly institutional history. Little can be found about sports experiences and the socio-cultural perspectives from the rank and file (Reinhard Krammer's essay is an exception). Perhaps this void was inevitable given the nature of the primary sources, but Leena Laine was honest enough to admit this shortcoming. Reflecting on the differences in scholarship between the project's early 1980s inception and its completion in the 1990s, Laine writes, with some remorse:

Now we have to look for people, their dreams, daily life on the sporting fields and in the gymnastic halls, sweat, laughter, and joy. This is a story of survival in political life, of complicated political situations. But the whole story of [the TUL] just as much as any other worker sport [organization], is not to be reduced to mere political history. More research will find the real subject of the TUL: boys and girls, women and men, their views on life, their vigour and courage, and their meaning of being part of a great human movement and dream. (p.79, quoted from the author's 1993 book)

Laine's admonitions should be embraced by all future researchers who seek to excavate the complex historical-cultural dimensions of twentieth century organized working-class sport.

Still, there are plenty of valuable anecdotes, information, and analysis for scholars and general readers alike. Given the paucity of published research on alternative sporting movements, this collection furthers our understanding of a neglected chapter of sport history.

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