

Reconstruction or New-Beginning? The Organization of Sports in Germany in the Post-War Period (1945-1955).

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The “Third Reich” ended by military and political catastrophe and unconditional surrender of the German armed forces on May 8, 1945. According to the acts of capitulation, the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain and France took over the supreme power. Reduced to the territory of precolonization days in the East, the rest of Germany was divided along the political concepts of the victors. Destroyed cities, millions of refugees and prisoners, dismantling of industries and making reparations—this was the result of a war Hitler in conspiracy with Stalin has started.

German sport as well was included in the national catastrophe and could not be re-established before December 1945 when the directive No. 23 was published by the allied control-commission in Berlin. Based on the different acts of this directive all gymnastics and sports clubs of the former NSRL (Nationalsozialists Federation of Physical Exercises) had to be dissolved and only local clubs were permitted by allied sport-officers. This was the beginning of a dynamic process, which came to an end in 1950. The democratic decision to establish the German Sports Federation, taken in Hanover on December 10, 1950, was among the hopeful signs of a fresh start after 1945. This Federation is a voluntary union of all gymnastic and sporting bodies in the Federal Republic and West Berlin, involving co-operation between people with different positions by former members of the working-class sports movement. Unity and peace were thus re-established in the gymnast’s camp after years of bitter agitation and polemics. The German Gymnasts Federation then experienced the greatest boom of all, the sports associations in the Federal Republic. Social responsibility was also accepted by all those in positions of power. Gymnastics and sports clubs became a vehicle of education and training outside school and later made a crucial contribution to realisation of the common aim: “Sport for all.”

Critical remarks however, seem to be inevitable concerning three important personalities of German Sport who have succeeded in starting a brilliant career in the “Third Reich” as well as in the postwar Federal Republic: Carl Diem, Guido V. Mengden and Karl V. Halt. One might have expected that these men, who had helped to pervert the democratic sports movement into an authoritarian and racially exclusive one from 1933-34 in the sense of the “political soldier,” would not rush to the leadership positions again after 1945.

In comparison to the development of post-war sports in the Federal Republic the new beginning of sports in the Soviet Zone was far more difficult, because by 1948 the Socialist Unity Party totally dominated political life. In the first period, until 1948, the East German Sport Movement began with the establishment of communal sport groups. Then sports was built up after the pattern and structure of sports organizations in the USSR. Sports became centralized under the leadership of FDJ (Free German Youth) and FDGB (Free German Labor Union). Finally, after having founded the DHfK (German University for Physical Culture) in Leipzig (on October 22, 1950), caderforge for top-athletes, and a State Committee for physical Education and Sport (July 24, 1952), linked with the ruling party (SED), a decisive step towards participation in international sport was done. By the year 1957 the German Gymnastic and Sport Union, based on 35 main sportive disciplines, was founded. This offered the chance to participate in international competition. According to the majority of these unions and to outstanding achievements of their athletes the DDR received international recognition and their unions became members of international federations.