

BOOK REVIEW

The Olympic Games, the Soviet Sports Bureaucracy, and the Cold War: Red Sport, Red Tape, by Jenifer Parks, Lanham, MD, Lexington Books, 2017, xxvi+205 pp., £65.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-4985-4118-3

Jenifer Parks follows the activities of the Soviet Sports Committee from the Soviet Union's Olympic debut in 1952 in Helsinki through the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow. She provides a chronological catalogue of the activities of the Soviet sports bureaucracy, based on archival materials of the All-Union Committee on Physical Culture and Sport of the Soviet Union (Sports Committee), the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Sports administrators in the Soviet Union skilfully mediated the demands placed upon them by a wide range of domestic and international interests. Parks describes how mid-level decision-makers in the Soviet Union contributed to the shape of global sport by adopting and transforming the idioms of Olympism. Parks chronicles the bureaucratic effort that made it possible for sport to function as an element of soft power and cultural diplomacy during the Cold War. This monograph moves towards an account of how bureaucrats enabled nation states to capitalize on the symbolic ambiguity of sport to promote political agendas.

The text spans five chapters, with predominant focus on the Brezhnev era (1964–1982) and the 1980 Olympic Games. Chapter 1 concentrates on the lead-up to the 1952 Olympics, with particular attention to the way that three administrators (Nikolai Romanov, Konstantin Andrianov, and Petr Sobolev) operated with political skill in the Sports Committee as well as the Soviet National Olympic Committee once it was formed in 1951. Avery Brundage, president of the IOC from 1952 to 1972, along with other IOC members, was sceptical about Soviet participation. Soviet inclusion enlivened debate within the IOC about amateurism and nationalism without producing a clear consensus. Chapter 2, picking up after Stalin's death in 1953, explores Khrushchev's years in power until 1964. This chapter aims to provide an account of the contradictions between the Olympic movement and Marxist-Leninist philosophy by focusing on the political frictions that administrators faced as sport became an increasingly significant dimension of foreign policy. Parks describes the emergence of Soviet international sport and the ideological conflicts that surrounded it in order to describe the mixed Soviet political influence in the socialist bloc, as well as in Asia and Africa. Chapters 3–5 address the 1980 Olympics. Chapter 3, picking up after Brezhnev takes power, focuses on the bid process. Chapter 4 describes the complex technical, cultural, and bureaucratic challenges involved in the organization of the mega-event in Moscow. In this chapter Parks excels, weaving together a fine-grained historical account how bureaucrats surmounted the organizational dimensions involved with staging an international event with 'Western' standards in a largely closed society. Chapter 5 focuses on elements of cultural diplomacy, the uses of propaganda, and political conflict, particularly the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan immediately prior to the Games and the resultant boycott by sixty nations. One theme that emerges strongly from this trio of chapters is that the Soviet Union and the West ultimately 'shared a common vision of modern sport' (166), a consensus about the potent symbolism of athletic spectacle and technical innovation that nonetheless left ample room for political manoeuvring. In the epilogue, Parks draws a line forward to the 2014 Sochi Games, emphasizing the continuities and differences between the 1980 and 2014 Games. One important point of bureaucratic connection is that Vitalii Smirnov, who replaced Aleksei Romanov as IOC member in 1971, and has served in a variety of important administrative capacities, played a key role in securing the 2014 Winter Games for Sochi.

In the arena of international sport, the overarching Soviet strategy from the 1940s onward was to cultivate authority within governing bodies as well as dominance in sports performance. However, the mechanisms that contributed to the success of Soviet sports administrators remain unsettled in Parks' account. Throughout the text, Parks stresses the importance of personal networks of strategic influence in shaping decisions domestically and internationally. Were there particularly Soviet approaches to cultivating and activating these networks? For example, Sergei Pavlov, who was placed in charge of the Sports Committee in 1968, had not only a formidable resume of administrative experience from his years of service in the Komsomol, but also received training in sports administration from the Moscow Institute of Physical Culture (88). To what extent was the professionalism and management skill of Soviet bureaucrats like Pavlov a result of formal sports administrative education? Parks dwells on the exercise of expertise rather than its cultivation. Additionally, Parks emphasizes upward and lateral bureaucratic connections, such as the importance of foreign language learning for sport delegates, and distinguished hosting arrangements for international colleagues, but it remains unclear what strategies administrators used when they pivoted to address subordinates in the Soviet sports apparatus. Deeper biographical attention would help to capture the individual motivations and management styles of the administrators Parks discusses.

Parks demonstrates how tensions between the two purposes of the Soviet sports system *massovost'* (mass participation) and *masterstvo* (mastery) were increasingly revealed from the late 1940s onward (9). So, too, did the tension between ideologies of equality and expertise emerge in the Soviet sports bureaucracy, as the efficacy of bureaucratic specialization under Brezhnev provoked a variety of reactions among the general population, including an increase in apathy. Parks' chronological panorama lays the backdrop for future studies of Soviet sport organization, including comparative studies of sportive bureaucracies as forms of political and cultural mediation. As the international stakes of sport rose from the 1950s onward, the common challenges of specialization and modernization solidified Soviet approaches to global sport. The most compelling parts of the text, such as the discussion of Soviet involvement with Indonesia in relation to the Games of New Emerging Forces in 1962, show the delicate balancing act of sportive diplomacy in securing Soviet international prestige while demonstrating strategic solidarity (56–59). Future research on sport in the Soviet Union will enable scholars to register variation across sports federations. How did the experiences and approaches of coaches and athletes differ according to the particular historical and technical constraints of their respective sports?

Perry Sherouse

Chicago, IL, USA

 perrymws@gmail.com

© 2017 Perry Sherouse

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2017.1362541>

