

Sport in politics - politics in sport. Stalinism in Poland in the years 1949-1956

MAREK ORDYLOWSKI, LEONARD SZYMANSKI

Address for correspondence: Katedra Humanistycznych Podstaw Kultury Fizycznej
Akademia Wychowania Fizycznego we Wrocławiu
al. Paderewskiego 35
51-612 Wrocław

Key words: politics, sport, stalinism

S U M M A R Y

The originator of modern Olympic movement, and simultaneously a leading sports theoretician, Baron P. de Coubertin naively expected that sports grounds and stadiums would be a place of a noble rivalry of the competitors for the victor's palm, and that the political, national, religious or racial animosities and prejudices would be rejected. According to his ideas, sport should also be devoid of economic conditions, and the sportsmen should compete for the mere satisfaction of victory, without material prizes. Yet, even in the times of the originator of modern Olympic movement, sport started to be used to achieve temporary political goals by various political movements and ideologies, because it assembled young people, that is the people who are the most susceptible to political manipulation. Before the Second World War the communists in Soviet Russia, various nationalist movements, workers' movement with its workers' Olympic games, or the Nazis utilized sport to achieve their political goals.

After the Second World War in Poland sport became the battlefield for a rough political struggle between PPR (Polish Workers' Party) and PPS (Polish Socialist Party). They fought for the model of Polish sport, the method of sport management and its functions. The problem was whether to take USSR as a model and to manage sport centrally, as the communists claimed, or, as the PPS wanted, to base on a social factor with simultaneous limiting state's interference. Of course, the PPR's version prevailed. They first applied the pre-war model in which the management structures of Polish physical culture were subordinated to the Ministry of National Defence. Various youth organizations - ZWM (Fighting Youth Association), OM TUR (Youth Organization of Workers' University Association), ZMW RP "Wici" (Country Youth Union of the Republic of Poland "Wici"), whose contribution in sport was considerable in the forties - also served young people indoctrination. Agricultural-Military Training in the years 1947-1948 and then the Common Organization "Service to Poland" in the years 1948-1955 also contributed to the political indoctrination of youth. The special interest of the PZPR leaders in that matter occurred after the resolution of the KC WKP(b) (Central Committee of All-union Communist Party of Bolsheviks) on common physical culture and sport passed in December 1948. After this resolution in all the countries of the Eastern block such resolutions were passed (in Poland it was passed in 1949). The above resolution significantly influenced the model of Polish sport, the evaluation of its achievements and on the ways of managing it for a long time. The whole Polish physical culture was subordinated to the PZPR's (Polish United Workers' Party) policy. This was achieved also by means of nominating party activists to all the important positions in Polish sport, starting from the President of GKKF (Central Committee of Physical Culture) (this position was always occupied by a party member) and ending with the presidents of local sports clubs at the place of work. Appointing people to all the posts in physical culture enumerated in the list was possible only after the acceptance of a suitable party committee. It was true in the case of both, nominated and elected positions, e.g. in sports organizations. Managers in sport were often people who were not specialists, but fully submitted to their party authorities. The examples of such personnel policy were Bolesław Faruga - the president of Central Physical Culture Committee, former First Secretary of a Białystok Committee of PZPR; his substitute, Russian UB (Secret Police) colonel,

Apolinary Minecki or Stanisław Lisowski, the secretary of GKKFiT (Central Committee of Physical Culture and Tourism), former army prosecutor who demanded capital punishment in a series of political lawsuits in the years 1945-1953.

The communist authorities treated sports events instrumentally. The authors stress the phenomenon of organizing sports events on the occasions of workers' movement holidays, new sports ceremonials consisting in joining together political meetings with sports meetings, propaganda uses of spectacular sports events for temporary political aims. The examples of such activities were famous Peace Races or Boxing European Championships in 1953 during which propaganda was exercised not only in respect to own citizens, but also there were attempts to agitate sportsmen from other countries.

Peace Races were not only spectacular sports events, but first of all propaganda events. They were accompanied by various peace manifestations of school children, speeches by local authorities etc.

Similar setting accompanied Boxing European Championships held in 1953 in Warsaw. This event also had its political aspect. High scores of Polish boxers and the defeat of Russian contestants (five gold medals for Poland and only two for the Soviet Union) caused consternation from the side of servilistic towards the USSR activists. Thus the curious protest of W. Reczek in AIBA against the victory of a Polish boxer Chychła over the Soviet contestant, Szczerbakow.

Leading Polish sportsmen sent letters to the friendly sportsmen from other countries, calling for common fight and work to prevent peace. Simultaneously, during condition camps or sports meetings sportsmen were constantly agitated to keep a proper political attitude during meetings with foreign sportsmen. For instance, the symbol of "capitalistic corruption" was Coca-Cola, whose drinking was strictly forbidden. When, during the Olympic Games in Helsinki reporters took pictures of Polish contestants who drank Coke in hiding, the supervisor of the Polish team, J. Putrament, gave them a terrible row, and then next severe consequences were drawn towards the sportsmen and their coach after the return to Poland. In the international contacts the authorities allowed meeting the representatives of so-called capitalistic countries only when Polish team had the chance to win or at least take a high location. Such directives were given to GKKF by the then PZPR leader, Bolesław Bierut. According to his instructions, the participation of Polish sportsmen in the work of international sports federations was possible only when the party authorities agreed, and every trip abroad by Polish sportsmen had to be accepted by the Foreign Department of PZPR. Sportsmen participated in important propaganda campaigns, such as passing the Constitution of PRL (Polish People's Republic) in 1952 or indicating the superiority of the communistic ideology over the capitalistic one in the field of physical culture etc. The Party also controlled the political-ideological side of scientific dissertations. The aspirations for quitting all the traditional norms and ethical and moral values functioning in social life were predominant. Denunciations and lampoons, usually on personal basis, became common.

A special role in sport "politicizing" was played by youth organizations, especially ZMP (Polish Youth's Union). It influenced young people first of all by means of aggressive ideological, political and educational activities. The organizers of sports meetings were obliged to present to the Main Board of ZMP or in the voivodeship departments of this organization the organizational plans of sports events, taking into consideration political and ideological aspects. Wide political and ideological activity was conducted also by the Common Organization "Service to Poland" which combined this with the realization of common duties of professional preparation, physical education and army training. Young people's indoctrination was conducted not only by ideological, political and educational work, but also by whole cultural and educational branch. It seems that, because of longer and deeper contact with young people during meetings, camps etc., the Common Organization "Service to Poland" was more efficient in propagating communistic propaganda than ZMP. Besides, the Common Organization "Service to Poland" had easier access to village youth which was more susceptible to ideology and demagogic

watchwords served by this organization daily. The Common Organization "Service to Poland" gained members also through organizing or co-organizing popular/mass sports meetings. Besides national races or autumn marches there were orienteering contests or multi-discipline sports events. These meetings always served strengthening communist political influence directed and controlled by the political apparatus of the Common Organization "Service to Poland".

The authorities tried to make a political profit out of the sports victories. They served popularizing sport and also the only right political system thanks to which these successes were allegedly achieved.

At the end of their debate the authors state that political aspects of developing Polish sport in the years 1949-1956 influenced negatively Polish sports movement.

http://www.awf.wroc.pl/hum_mov/english/02/papers/art02.htm