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HOW SPORT HELPS EXPLAIN THE FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL

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Abstract
While the exploitation of sport for the legitimation of state socialism in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) has attracted widespread attention, the role of sport in the collapse of the one-party dictatorship is a little explored area. With particular reference to the 1980s, this article argues how sport, at elite and recreational level, both reflected and exacerbated tensions and conflicts in politics, the economy, culture and society. Although the deepening economic malaise, the courage of protesters on the streets of Leipzig and the shock waves triggered by Gorbachev's reforms were primary agents in the fall of Communism, the prevalence of autonomous activities in East German sport and the ensuing challenge to authority contributed significantly to the socio-cultural defeat of GDR-style socialism. In effect, sport represented a way of saying 'no' that grew ever louder, more diverse and more widespread as the fateful autumn of 1989 approached.
Keywords: East Germany; mass and elite sport; sports fans and agency; transnational history; Cold War; Berlin Wall
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Introduction: Sport, State and Society

In 1988, just one year before the Berlin Wall was dismantled, the GDR[1] achieved a remarkable set of results at the Summer Olympics held in Seoul. Despite the country's small demographic base, its multi-talented squad, with 102 medals, finished a close second to the Soviet Union but ahead of its main capitalist rivals, the USA and the Federal Republic of Germany. Erich Honecker,[2] the veteran leader of the ruling party, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED),[3] could bask in the reflected glory of the 'diplomats in track suits' who had been programmed for success in the medal factories of special sports schools and at the generously funded elite sports clubs associated with the Dynamo Sports Association, the National People's Army and the umbrella organization responsible for mass and elite sport, the German Gymnastics and Sports Federation (*Deutscher Turn- und Sportbund*, DTSB). The sports system was ruthlessly instrumentalized by the SED to help the GDR break out of its international diplomatic isolation, to symbolize the prowess of the young East German state and, in general, to underpin the domestic legitimation of the state socialist system in its inter-systemic rivalry with the West German liberal democratic and capitalist order and in the hard-fought sports contests with its fraternal socialist allies in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

As for Honecker himself, IOC President Juan Samaranch awarded him the IOC Gold Olympic Order in 1985 for his role in the campaign to avoid another Olympic boycott. Even more significantly, in September 1987, Honecker paid what was *de facto* an official visit to West Germany during which he met Chancellor Helmut Kohl and President Richard von Weizsäcker. On his return, he assured his Politbüro colleagues that it had demonstrated the independence and sovereignty of the GDR.[4] While there is good reason to attribute to sport

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1 The German Democratic Republic was founded in 1949 and incorporated into the Federal Republic of Germany in 1990. Its capital was East Berlin and East Germany will be used interchangeably with GDR.

2 Erich Honecker (1912–1994), born in Neunkirchen (Saarland), held the following high offices: chair of the Free German Youth movement 1949 to 1955, First Secretary of the SED 1971 to 1976 and General Secretary until 1989, and chair of the State Council 1976 to 1989. As SED Central Committee Secretary for Security, he was in charge of the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961.

3 The SED was founded in 1946 and asserted itself as the country's dominant political force in the 1950s.

4 Detlef Nakath and Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, eds., *Von Hubertusstock nach Bonn. Eine dokumentierte Geschichte der deutsch-deutschen Beziehungen auf höchster Ebene 1980–1987* (Berlin: Dietz, 1996), 336–338.

a significant role in system maintenance, within a few months of Seoul and with thousands fleeing across the Iron Curtain in Hungary and Czechoslovakia and protests being staged on the streets of Leipzig, East Berlin and other major cities, Honecker would be ousted from power by a palace revolution. Soon afterwards, the chaotic opening of the Berlin Wall on the evening of 9th November 1989 precipitated the collapse of the SED regime and, with astonishing speed, the unification of Germany in October of the following year. Within a few years, sport would undergo the radical transformation that affected all sectors of East German society and top coaches and sports scientists involved in the doping programme and the architect of the 'sports miracle', Manfred Ewald, would be brought to trial.[5]

Such an outcome was not on the horizon when, at the SED's Eighth Congress in 1971, Erich Honecker addressed the societal role of sport: "Our state is well regarded in the world not only because of the excellent performance of our top athletes but also because of the unrelenting attention we devote to physical culture and sports to make them an everyday need of each and every citizen."[6]

Engagement in sport was to enhance labour productivity and develop key characteristics of the socialist personality such as discipline, honesty and willingness to defend the homeland. Various schemes were devised to facilitate mass participation, among them the Joint Sports Programme of the DTSB, Confederation of Free German Trade Unions (*Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*, FDGB) and Free German Youth (*Freie Deutsche Jugend*, FDJ), to encourage not only active forms of relaxation such as swimming and walking but also the competitive spirit of participants. Furthermore, given sport's political, cultural and ideological power, it was incorporated into the SED's societal policy as reconfigured by Honecker soon after he came to power in 1971. Called the unity of economic and social policy, it constituted an informal social contract whereby the regime deployed a range of social benefits such as a heavily subsidized social welfare system, more apartment housing, job security guarantees and heavy investment in top-level sport to elicit, at the very least, the tacit support of the populace for the East German socialist state.

The notion of sport as a social glue has some backing from research by a Leipzig Centre for Youth Research project carried out in 1978: a sample of about 3,250 young people up to 30 years of age found that over 90 percent took

[5] Manfred Ewald (1926–2002) was Chair of the State Committee for Physical Culture and Sport from 1952 to 1960 and then President of the DTSB from 1961 to 1988.

[6] Wolfgang Gitter and Bernhard Wilk, *Fun – Health – Fitness. Physical culture and sport in the GDR* (East Berlin: Panorama, 1974), 15.

delight in the GDR's position as a leading sports nation (*Sportland*) and almost all wished for victory at international events.[7] Careful research by Thomas Fetzer underpins this argument: on the basis of the consumption of sport on television, he contends that enthusiasm was high for success in international sport from 1973 onwards before tailing off in the mid-1980s as the dark side of the elite sports model became more apparent.[8]

While the negative aspects of elite sport were palpable at domestic level, Honecker and many other members of the top political and sports echelons clung to its perceived soft power benefits until the late 1980s. In doing so, they had to weigh the benefits against the onerous financial, ethical and health costs of the hunt for Faust's gold. The title of this article is seemingly less ambitious than that in an interview with Thomas Brussig as to how football might explain the world,[9] and it is certainly not claimed that sport was the major propellant of the opening of the Berlin Wall. The novel aspect of this paper, however, is to stress interconnections in four areas that draw upon transnational approaches to encounters across the Iron Curtain and upon everyday interests and activities of sports enthusiasts that challenged the basic ideological and political tenets of state socialism.

With particular reference to the 1980s, it will be shown how popular resentment spiralled over the neglect of mass sport due to the heavy subsidization of an ailing top-level sports system; how the snowballing fitness movement and fun sports highlighted a shift in society towards greater independence in leisure time; how the frequency of cross-border exchanges between East and West German sports fans turned the Iron Curtain into an increasingly porous membrane and undermined the SED notion of a socialist nation in the GDR; and how the

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7 Peter Voß and Hans Heinicke, "Das Verhältnis Jugendlicher zu Körperkultur und Sport sowie Formen, Bedingungen und Probleme seiner Realisierung: Ergebnismaterial zum Forschungsbericht," ZIJ Leipzig, 1978, 5, 17–18, 76, https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-380003. Much lower rates were recorded for the view that top-level sport furthered other areas of sport, for example, mass sport. The researchers also found that the material conditions for taking part in sport, especially in leisure and recreational sports such as table tennis, swimming and bowling, were inadequate both in quality and quantity. See ibid., 78.

8 Thomas Fetzer, "Die gesellschaftliche Akzeptanz des Leistungssportsystems," in *Sport in der DDR. Eigensinn, Konflikte, Trends*, ed. Hans Joachim Teichler (Köln: Sport und Buch Strauß, 2003), 284–291, 299–302, 347–350.

9 "'Sich die ganze Welt vom Fußball her erklären': Thomas Brussig im Gespräch mit Stefan Hermanns und Markus Hesselmann," in *Querpässe. Beiträge zur Literatur-, Kultur- und Mediengeschichte des Fußballs*, ed. Ralf Adelmann, Rolf Parr, and Thomas Schwarz (Heidelberg: Synchron Publishers, 2003), 171–176. Brussig regards football as potentially both subversive and regime supportive: ibid., 175.

often spectacular defection of top East German athletes fed into the burgeoning emigration movement that erupted into the mass flight at the end of the decade and ultimately the opening of the Berlin Wall.

In short, the explanatory thrust of the paper is that sport both reflected and exacerbated gathering crisis symptoms in other spheres of society while simultaneously undergoing its own structural crisis as the 1980s unfolded. The methodology combines a view from above, with reference to the main policymakers in Party and government, with one from below, focusing on how participants in sport, especially fans, sought to carve out autonomous spaces, whether in the GDR itself or across the borders in socialist Eastern Europe. With its intrinsic characteristic of having a life of its own, sport had the capacity to unfetter the 'powerless' even in one of the country's most thoroughly controlled spheres.[10]

Sources

Given the appeal of sport and the accomplishments of the GDR's 'diplomats in tracksuits', it is surprising that it has been seriously neglected in many standard histories of the GDR both before and after 1990, for example, by Hermann Weber and Klaus Schroeder respectively. Other than forays into the Olympic Boycotts of 1980 and 1984, this is also true of many works on the Cold War, even by such a notable scholar as Odd Arne Westad.[11] In contrast, impressive research has been carried out on fundamental components of GDR sport, which this article will draw on to explore how popular attitudes towards sport intertwined with growing mass dissatisfaction with state socialism in the later years of SED rule. Hans Joachim Teichler has delineated the structures of top-level sport and edited invaluable collections of sports directives and policies emanating from the SED Politbüro and Central Committee Secretariat.[12] The clandestine doping

[10] The power of sport and play as both a dependent and an independent aspect of human agency is captured by Kay Schiller and Christopher Young, "The History and Historiography of Sport in Germany: Social, Cultural and Political Perspectives," *German History* 27, no. 3 (2009): 319, doi: 10.1093/gerhis/ghp029.

[11] Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (London: Allen Lane, 2017). For a discussion of the neglect of sport in Cold War studies, see Robert Edelman and Christopher Young, "Introduction. Explaining Cold War Sport," in *The Whole World Was Watching. Sport in the Cold War*, ed. Robert Edelman and Christopher Young (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 3–4.

[12] Hans Joachim Teichler and Klaus Reinartz, *Das Leistungssportsystem der DDR in den 80er Jahren und im Prozeß der Wende* (Schorndorf: Verlag Karl Hofmann, 1999).

programme,[13] surveillance by the Stasi,[14] and the comprehensive talent identification and development system[15] have also been thoroughly investigated, albeit not without controversy as to the uniqueness of the GDR sports model and the harms experienced by athletes.

Yet below the surface of the so-called 'sports miracle', researchers and investigative journalists have explored individual and collective agency in sport. In this context, notable contributions have been made by René Wiese and Jutta Braun on football fandom across the Berlin Wall[16] and by Alan McDougall on football culture and politics.[17] Hanns Leske has shown how, despite Stasi repression, the ministry and police failed to control and suppress 'deviant' fan behaviour in stadia and public places where regulation clashed with self-determination and the cultural power of football.[18] A similar pattern can be found in the battle between authority and enthusiasts in minor sports such as skateboarding, windsurfing and karate for sites in which to engage in new, autonomous activities.[19] Frequent private transnational cross-border encounters among sports fans, as in football and motor cycling, also exposed the limits of autocracy and the widening chinks in the Iron Curtain in the 1980s.[20]

The secondary literature is complemented by interviews, memoirs, and archival materials, especially those emanating from the SED, the DTSB and the

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[13] The pioneering work is Brigitte Berendonk, *Doping. Von der Forschung zum Betrug* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1992).

[14] Giselher Spitzer, *Sicherungsvorgang Sport. Das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit und der DDR-Spitzensport* (Schorndorf: Verlag Karl Hofmann, 2005).

[15] René Wiese, *Kaderschmieden des „Sportwunderlandes". Die Kinder- und Jugendsportsschulen der DDR* (Hildesheim: Arete, 2012).

[16] René Wiese and Jutta Braun, *Doppelpässe. Wie die Deutschen die Mauer umspielten* (Hamburg: Verlag Sport & Co., 2006).

[17] Alan McDougall, *The People's Game. Football, State and Society in East Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[18] Hanns Leske, *Erich Mielke, die Stasi und das runde Leder* (Göttingen: Die Werkstatt, 2004).

[19] Jutta Braun, "The People's Sport? Popular Sport and Fans in the Later Years of the German Democratic Republic," *German History* 27, no. 3 (2009): 414–428, doi: 10.1093/gerhis/ghp034; various contributions to Hans Joachim Teichler, ed., *Sport in der DDR. Eigensinn, Konflikte, Trends* (Köln: Sport und Buch Strauß, 2003).

[20] On transnational approaches in Communist studies, see Constantin Iordachi and Péter Apor, "Introduction. Studying Communist Dictatorships: From Comparative Communism to Transnational History," *East Central Europe* 40, no. 1–2 (2013): 1–35, doi: 10.1163/18763308-04001016. For GDR sport in a global context: Alan McDougall, "Fußball Internationale: Toward a Global History of GDR Football," in *Football Nation. The Playing Fields of German Culture, History and Society*, ed. Rebeccah Dawson, Bastian Heinsohn, Oliver Knabe, and Alan McDougall (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2023), 43–61; Daniel Lange, "Dynamo in Afrika: Doppelpass am Pulverfass," *Deutschland Archiv* (30 June 2022): 1–12, https://www.bpb.de/510044.

Ministry of State Security or Stasi.[21] Not only do SED materials shed light into the upper echelons of policymaking but Stasi records, with their orientation towards security, are invaluable for exploring fan disorder and defection in sport. Another crucial source is that of *Eingaben*, or citizen petitions, usually as letters sent individually or collectively, to government and Party bodies complaining about the many shortcomings in society such as declining living standards and restrictions on travel. Citizens had the constitutional right to complain and to receive an answer within a month. Among the torrent of complaints that poured into state and Party organs those in sport took issue with shortages of equipment, lack of facilities for training, restrictions on independent sporting activities, and corruption in football.[22] Letters of complaint to government and SED offices were also despatched outside the formal *Eingabe* channel; many of those sent anonymously, pervaded by biting criticism of dictatorial rule and lower living standards than in West Germany, found their way into the records of the notorious Stasi Main Department XX.[23] Together with *Eingaben*, these letters constitute an invaluable mosaic of everyday life and of voices from below.

Interviews are another form of voice. Whereas before unification, doping was occasionally mentioned in interviews with athletes who had fled the GDR, such as the sprinter Renate Neufeld,[24] post-unification interviews and memoirs provide moving testimonies to both short- and long-term physical and psychological harms resulting from doping and spying by the Stasi.[25] Interviews with football fans of clubs such as Union Berlin, Dynamo Berlin and Lok Leipzig help recreate the carnival atmosphere of fandom not immediately apparent

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[21] Crucial top-level sport directives and policy documents issued by the SED Politbüro are published in Hans Joachim Teichler, *Die Sportbeschlüsse des Politbüros. Eine Studie zum Verhältnis von SED und Sport mit einem Gesamtverzeichnis und einer Dokumentation ausgewählter Beschlüße* (Köln: Sport und Buch Strauß, 2002).

[22] For an examination of the culture of complaint and the intersection between the private and public spheres, see Paul Betts, *Within Walls. Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 173–192.

[23] A selection can be found in Siegfried Suckut, ed., *Volkes Stimmen. "Ehrlich, aber deutlich" – Privatbriefe an die DDR-Regierung* (Munich: dtv, 2016), with an introduction on pages 9 to 108.

[24] "DDR: Schluck Pillen oder kehr Fabriken aus," *Der Spiegel*, 19 March 1979, 194, 196, 198–199, 201, 204, 206–207.

[25] Hans-Georg Aschenbach, *Euer Held. Euer Verräter. Mein Leben für den Leistungssport* (Halle/Saale: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2012). Testimonies by athletes at the trials of GDR sports administrators and sports scientists are an essential record: Klaus Marxen and Gerhard Werle, eds., *Strafjustiz und DDR-Unrecht. Dokumentation*, Vol. 7: *Gefangenmisshandlung, Doping und sonstiges DDR-Unrecht* (Berlin: De Gruyter Recht, 2009); Sybille Reinhardt, *Schattengold. Eine Olympiasiegerin erzählt* (Zwickau: Tauchaer Verlag, 2008).

from the voluminous police and Stasi records.[26] Where official documentation is lacking, as in minor sports such as karate, interviews and memoirs are essential for tracking their development and struggle for space and tolerance.[27] Not all memoirs can be accepted at face value, particularly by many former officials and sports scientists, who tend to play down the negative aspects of the system and generally exculpate themselves of wrongdoing, a thread that runs through the recollections of Manfred Ewald, the autocratic and ruthlessly efficient DTSB President.[28]

The sources discussed above are indispensable for investigating the voices and everyday experiences of sports enthusiasts, whether at home or abroad. These insights into the base of society are often absent in what Jens Gieseke has called 'hidden' popular opinion surveys compiled by East and West German research institutes.[29] Rarely GDR representative, the East German surveys remained classified until the collapse of the GDR, with the SED so sensitive to any negative findings that it closed down the Institute for Public Opinion Research of the Central Committee in 1979. Among the most informative Western sources are the annual interviews conducted by the Infratest polling institute between 1968 and 1990 into West Germans' recollections of the opinions of their East German contacts during visits to the GDR.

The Infratest findings act as a lens on how the high levels of popular dissatisfaction with restrictions on travel, political pressures, consumer goods shortages and a strong desire for greater free time in the private sphere interact and overlap with sport-related grievances. On the other hand, unification was widely regarded as little more than a distant target and the GDR was for long perceived as a viable, separate state with significant social achievements in social security, job protection, and the health and education sectors.[30] With regard to these

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[26] Above all, Anne Hahn and Frank Willmann, eds., *Stadionpartisanen. Fußballfans und Hooligans in der DDR* (Halle/Saale: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2021). See also Frank Willmann, ed., *Fußball-Land DDR. Anstoß, Abpfiff, Aus* (Berlin: Eulenspiegel, 2004).

[27] On the importance of interviews for tracing the development of karate, see Kurt Repmann, "Die konfliktreiche Entwicklung des Karatesports in der DDR," in Teichler, ed., *Sport in der DDR*, 502.

[28] Manfred Ewald, *Ich war der Sport. Wahrheiten und Legenden aus dem Wunderland der Sieger. Manfred Ewald interviewt von Reinhold Andert* (Berlin: Elefanten Press, 1994).

[29] Jens Gieseke, "Opinion Polling Behind and Across the Iron Curtain: How West and East German Pollsters Shaped Knowledge Regimes on Communist Societies," *History of the Human Sciences* 29, no. 4–5 (2016): 77–98, doi: 10.1177/0952695116667880.

[30] Everhard Holtmann and Anne Köhler, *Wiedervereinigung vor dem Mauerfall. Einstellungen der Bevölkerung der DDR im Spiegel geheimer westlicher Meinungsumfragen* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2015); Anne Köhler and Volker Ronge, "'Einmal BRD-einfach': Die DDR-Ausreise-Welle im Frühjahr 1984," *Deutschland Archiv* 17, no. 12 (1984): 1280–1286; Richard Hilmer and Anne

components of the paternalistic *soziale Geborgenheit* of the Honecker era, similar attitude patterns were identified by the Institute for Sociology and Social Policy of the Academy of Social Sciences and other East German research institutes carrying out studies of popular opinion.[31] Significantly, even at a time when the GDR was unravelling, strong support for aspects of social policy, such as child-care facilities and social security, was recorded by the Institute for Sociology and Social Policy in 1988–1989.[32]

It was not until the 1980s were drawing to a close, above all in the crisis year of 1989, that Infratest data identified a sharp fall in support for the GDR as a separate state as well as for the state socialist system. One finding encapsulates the depth of the crisis: whereas in May 1989, about 50 percent of West Germans' Eastern contacts had expressed dissatisfaction with political conditions, the figure had soared to 70 percent in August.[33] The Leipzig Central Institute for Youth Research found a similar collapse in young people's identification with the GDR.[34] Other GDR researchers also drew attention to a generation gap: younger people were much more committed than older East Germans to individualistic values and far less to the collective norms of the past.[35]

In conclusion, the now declassified social science surveys, both East and West German, while surprisingly short on references to sport, help identify the political, economic, cultural and mental predeterminants of the opening of the Berlin Wall and provide context for how sport fits into the decline and fall narrative as regards travel, shortages of goods, political repression and, according to the Central Institute for Youth Research, the cultural revolution that found

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Köhler, "Die DDR läuft die Zukunft davon. Die Übersiedler-Flüchtlingswelle im Sommer 1989," *Deutschland Archiv* 22, no. 12 (1989): 1383–1393. On the other hand, Hans Georg Wieck, the head of the Federal Intelligence Service (*Bundesnachrichtendienst*, BND) from 1985 to 1990, claims that the organization's systematic assessment, carried out every six months since 1986, by questionnaire of East Germans visiting the FRG or at the Marienfelde refugee centre showed that between 72 and 78 per cent wanted unification but that the wish for a higher standard of living rather than enthusiasm for democracy was a fundamental factor in keeping alive an all-German consciousness: Hermann Wentker, "Die DDR in den Augen des BND (1985–1990). Ein Interview mit Dr. Hans Georg Wieck," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 56, no. 12 (2008): 327–328, 337–339, doi: 10.1524/vfzg.2008.0012.

[31] On East German opinion surveying, see Thomas Gensicke, "Mentalitätswandel und Revolution. Wie sich die Bürger von ihrem System abwandten," *Deutschland Archiv* 25, no. 12 (1992): 1266–1283.

[32] Ibid., 1270, 1282.

[33] Holtmann and Köhler, *Wiedervereinigung*, 247.

[34] Walter Friedrich, "Mentalitätswandlungen der Jugend in der DDR," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, no. 16–17 (13 April 1990): 27, 29, 30.

[35] Gensicke, "Mentalitätswandel," 1270, 1282.

expression in the wish to shape one's own life. Sport, however, is prominent in several of the institute's special investigations into the interests and leisure activities of East German youth. A 1987 survey of young workers and apprentices found a sharp drop in interest in sports participation since 1987. Not only these two groups but also students and members of the intelligentsia bemoaned the chronic shortages of skateboards, sailing boats, climbing equipment and surfing wear that restricted participation in sports of their own choice.[36] It is to these areas and cross border encounters among sports fans that this paper now turns.

The Structural Crisis of Elite Sport

The highly impressive results at the 1988 Winter Olympic Games in Calgary were judged by Egon Krenz to be the true sports miracle in light of the crumbling state of the country's sports facilities.[37] Krenz, born in 1937, was a member of the inner circle of the SED Politbüro and, since 1983, Central Committee Secretary for Security, Youth and Sport. Among the other problems of what Giselher Spitzer has called a structural crisis since the mid-1980[38] were the ever-fiercer competition from new sporting powers such as China and South Korea and heavier investment in top-level sport by the FRG, the USSR and other traditional rivals. Growing commercialization and professionalism in international sport threatened to undermine the advantages derived by the GDR from its covert professionalism. Compounding these problems was the expansion in the number of Olympic events, thus making it more difficult for the GDR, with its lower demographic and economic potential, to continue focusing on a limited number of medal-rich disciplines. The consequent unscrupulous recourse to experimental and highly powerful performance-enhancing techniques and drugs posed ethical challenges and impeded recruitment from what was a diminishing demographic pool of young talent.

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[36] Günter Roski, "Körperkultur und Sport – fester Bestandteil der sozialistischen Lebensweise der Jugend der DDR: Untersuchung Jugend und Massensport 1987" (Leipzig: Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung, 1987), 27–29, https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de0168-ssoar-400883. About 2,200 persons aged 16 to 35 years were surveyed between June and July 1987 at universities and in industry and agriculture in the Suhl and Gera Administrative Regions (*Bezirke*).

[37] Behörde des/der Bundesbeauftragten für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR (hereafter BStU), MfS, ZA, HA XX, no. 15219, "Vermerk," 6 April 1988, 12.

[38] Giselher Spitzer, "Die Strukturkrise der achtziger Jahre," in *Schlüsseldokumente zum DDR-Sport. Ein sporthistorischer Überblick in Originalquellen*, ed. Giselher Spitzer, Hans Joachim Teichler, and Klaus Reinartz (Aachen: Meyer & Meyer, 1998), 247–251, 256.

Elite sport, a voracious monster, required vast sums to support a complex network of organizations, advanced training facilities, thousands of competitors and their entourages of trainers, sports scientists, technical experts and medical practitioners. The backbone of the system was the pyramidal system for the identification and development of youthful talent comprising Training Centres at the base, the pivotal Children's and Youth Sports Schools (*Kinder- und Jugendsportschulen*, KJS) and, at the apex, elite sports clubs such as SC Dynamo Berlin. A precise costing of the system is impossible not only on account of its sheer size and complexity but also due to covert funding of clubs by industrial enterprises and SED regional elites. The vast Stasi surveillance network of informers and full-time staff also needs to be taken into account. But the generous financial allocations by state bodies are known, and they were not to the liking of finance and economic planning experts, notably Gerhard Schürer, a Politbüro candidate member and chair of the State Planning Commission, and the powerful Politbüro member and economic Czar, Günter Mittag, the SED Central Committee Secretary for the Economy.[39]

Resourcing top-level sport, a reoccurring battle between key figures in sport, politics and finance throughout the 1970s and 1980s, came to a head in the economic gloom of the late 1980s. The dire economic situation was encapsulated in the heavy hard currency indebtedness as communicated by Gerhard Schürer and other finance experts to Honecker in September 1989 and, with no action being taken, to his successor Egon Krenz in the following month, with the prognosis that the debt would soar to about 57 billion Valuta Marks.[40] The plight of the economy and the heavy subsidization of education, rents, housing, sport and other areas of social policy formed the background to the negotiations over investment in elite sport in the Politbüro high-performance sports directive of 1989 and the Grundlinie 2000. The former concerned the aims and requirements for the 1992 Summer and the 1994 Winter Olympics and the latter the organization and financing of the development of elite sport until the year 2000.

In discussions over the 1989 high-performance sports directive the State Planning Commission, for the first time, removed elite sport's privileged position in the state investment plan, rejected the sports leadership's request for additional staff and reduced its demand for 471 million GDR Marks between

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[39] See the interview with Gerhard Schürer and his deputy Siegfried Wenzel in *Der Plan als Befehl und Fiktion. Wirtschaftsführung in der DDR. Gespräche und Analysen*, ed. Theo Pirker, M. Rainer Lepsius, and Hans-Hermann Hertle (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1995), 73–74, 78.

[40] Mike Dennis, *Social and Economic Modernization in Eastern Germany from Honecker to Kohl* (London: Pinter Publishers, and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 27–30.

1991 and 1995 to 238 million GDR Marks.[41] Hitherto, the top rung of the elite sports system, Tier 1, had been accustomed to inexorable growth rates of more than five per cent, sometimes as high as ten per cent. Such deep cuts were incompatible with the Politbüro goal – as finalized in its directive of January 1989 – for the GDR to remain one of the top three sports nations. Retrenchment would have entailed a reduction in the size of elite squads and a serious fall in investment in medal-garnering sports such as swimming and track and field as well as in sports medicine and sports science. Krenz, wearing his political hat, persuaded the Politbüro, with Honecker's decisive support, to reduce the State Planning Commission's cuts to 348.7 million GDR Marks.

Clinging obdurately to success in global sport as a form of soft power and for the promotion of regime stability entailed an addiction to the notorious state doping programme and condoning the search for 'wonder' substances at a time when, as is discussed below, questions were being raised by parents about the harms to children caught up in the doping trap. All the various machinations, plans and calculations were to no avail as escalating costs closed off the urgent modernization and construction of new sports facilities and terminated the heavy subsidization of top-level sport. The aspiration of the new DTSB leader Klaus Eichler, who replaced the highly unpopular Ewald as the organization's president in 1988, to downsize the elite sports system and to counter rising popular criticism of the neglect of mass sport by expanding facilities in tennis, skateboarding, ice skating and other sports would prove too hesitant and far too late.[42]

Mass Sport: The Poor Relation

In 1969, the radical division of sport into two tiers greatly disadvantaged mass sport as the upper echelon benefited from much higher levels of state funding in keeping with the target of raising the GDR to the apex of world sport. The restructuring was a decisive victory for proponents of the primacy of elite sport against those who, in the late 1950s and 1960s, advocated a balance between the two spheres or, at least, an equitable allocation for mass sport. While sports in Tier 1, such as athletics, swimming, gymnastics and rowing were lavishly endowed as they promised a rich haul of medals, those in what became known as

[41] For further details, see Hans Joachim Teichler, "Staatsplan ohne 'Sportobjektive'. Anmerkungen zur wirtschaftlichen Talfahrt," in *Goldkinder. Die DDR im Spiegel ihres Spitzensports*, ed. Grit Hartmann (Leipzig: Forum Verlag, 1998), 243–245; Spitzer, "Die Strukturkrise," 255, 286–288.

[42] Giselher Spitzer, "Machtkämpfe. Anfang und Ende der Lex Ewald 1955–1989," in *Goldkinder. Die DDR im Spiegel ihres Spitzensports*, ed. Grit Hartmann (Leipzig: Forum Verlag, 1998), 277–281.

Tier 2 from 1971 onwards had considerably less financial support and therefore fewer opportunities to access facilities and to recruit highly qualified trainers and medical experts. Talented athletes were delegated towards Tier 1 sports, not to those in Tier 2 such as tennis, table tennis, fishing and motor sports.[43] The allocation of state funding indicates the chasm between elite and mass sport: in February 1990, the DTSB executive revealed that 62.8 per cent of funding was channelled into the upper echelon and only 37.2 per cent into the lower rung, not one in four GDR Marks as previously indicated.[44] Such a disproportionate allocation of resources undermined the SED claim that high participation in mass sport was a defining feature of the country's sports system.

While mass sport was seriously underfunded and the 'virtuous circle' of mass and elite sport little more than fiction, non-Olympic sports attached to DTSB sports associations like fishing and bowling managed to attract tens of thousands of enthusiasts as did country-wide sports programmes with millions of participants such as *Eile mit Meile*, a state response to the jogging movement in the West, and the Joint Sports Programme of the DTSB, FDGB and FDJ with its key insignia "Ready to Defend the Homeland". The international Peace Race through Eastern Europe and activities under the umbrella of enterprise sports groups also enjoyed widespread appeal. That said, top athletes' preferential access to goods supplied by Western firms, shortages of sports equipment and the poor state of facilities aroused widespread popular ire. A selection of statistics illustrates the seriousness of the problem. In 1992, the *Deutscher Sportbund* (German Sports Confederation) reported on the desolate state of East German sports buildings and venues: in percentage terms, only 11.3 of sports fields, 10.6 of gymnasia, 17.5 of sports halls and 8.6 of outdoor swimming pools were in a usable condition. The costs of modernization and renovation over a period of fifteen years would, it was estimated, amount to at least 25 billion Deutsche Marks.[45]

Sports fans frequently had recourse to *Eingaben* or citizen petitions to vent their frustration and anger with deficiencies in the provision of sports goods and the availability of facilities. The DTSB was the favoured target of petitioners. As

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[43] Klaus Reinartz, "Die Zweiteilung des DDR-Sports auf Beschluß der SED," in Teichler and Reinartz, *Das Leistungssportsystem*, 63–68.

[44] Ibid., 73, 77.

[45] Hans-Dieter Krebs, "Die politische Instrumentalisierung des Sports in der DDR," in *Materialien der Enquete-Kommission 'Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland'*, vol. III/2, ed. Deutscher Bundestag (Baden-Baden: Nomos, and Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), 1353–1354.

the 1980s progressed, a vesuvian flow of complaints concerning inefficiencies and inequalities not only in sport but in wider society poured into the offices of state and SED leaders such as Krenz, Honecker, Mielke, Erbach and Ewald. In statistical terms, almost every East German household took advantage of their constitutional right to submit a petition between 1949 and 1989 and to receive a response within one month; by the mid-1980s, over one million petitions, with perceptibly less deference, were being submitted each year to an overwhelmed bureaucracy.[46] Petitions focused on the poor quality of housing, inadequacies in health provision, restrictions on travel abroad, emigration to West Germany and consumer goods shortages. The breakdown in trust and the seriousness of the socio-economic crisis is evidenced in the sharp rise in *Eingaben* to the Council of State, from about 59,000 in 1985 to a new height of almost 135,000 in 1988.[47]

Complaints homing in on sport in the 1980s frequently intertwine the material everyday with the fracturing of the fragile social consensus erected on the unity of social and economic policy and on the alleged virtuous circle of mass and elite sport. This intersection is palpable in the frequency of complaints about footwear, not simply ordinary running shoes but also specialist items such as walking, ski and mountain boots, and handball and basketball training shoes. An *Eingabe* from a Berliner in May 1983 highlighted the hollowness of official pronouncements on the value of mass sport when citizens, or so it was claimed, had to run in bare feet, climb without ropes and go on biking trips without cycles.[48] In the same year, a petitioner from Dresden protested to Ewald that he did not simply want to read about the success of sports policy in the newspapers but rather to experience it himself by being able to acquire running shoes.[49] In an earlier petition to the DTSB, he had poured scorn on the notion of the GDR as a sports nation and its garnering of gold medals while neglecting the true sports festival of the nation comprising enthusiastic amateur runners that turned out in their thousands for the GutsMuths and other race meetings.[50]

While the complaint procedure was part of state policy to identify sources of conflict and, optimistically, to pacify complainants, the increasingly sharp and

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[46] Betts, *Within Walls*, 189–191.
[47] Beatrix Bouvier, *Die DDR – ein Sozialstaat? Sozialpolitik in der Ära Honecker* (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz, 2002), 320–327.
[48] Hans Joachim Teichler, "Konfliktlinien des Sportalltags. Eingaben zum Thema Sport," in Teichler, *Sport in der DDR*, 543.
[49] Ibid., 538.
[50] Ibid., 539.

open critique of the 1980s, as in these three petitions, show a political culture with elements of defiance and protest. On occasions, complaints turned into overt criticism of political corruption and repression in sport, thereby further undermining the soft-power legitimation strategy of the SED. This is evident in the flood of local protests and *Eingaben* from Dresden Dynamo fans in 1981 concerning the banning of the club's star footballers Peter Kotte and Matthias Müller from playing in the two top flights in connection with plans by their colleague Gerd Weber to flee the GDR. Weber was banned from all forms of football and spent nine months in jail; ironically, he was a Stasi informer.[51]

Complaints rained in from East Berlin, Dresden, Potsdam and Leipzig, about top athletes' privileged access to training centres and swimming pools, thus reinforcing negative views on the disparity between mass and elite sport.[52] The difficulties in using swimming pools and sports halls were a reflection of the parlous state of the construction industry, especially in the late 1980s, which restricted the construction of much-needed costly facilities in elite sport and led to a serious deterioration in the condition of the building infrastructure across all sports.[53] The contradiction in SED propaganda for greater participation in sport and the shortage of sports-related goods was admitted internally in a letter from the DTSB department for the economy to one of the organization's vice-presidents in late 1980: "We are already short of around 700,000 pairs of running shoes. That is, around 1 million citizens will try – in vain – to get running shoes and then moan about our propaganda advocating running and health."[54]

In replying to petitioners, DTSB staff often had to admit to serious shortages but tried to sweeten the pill by holding out hope for an eventual improvement. The state's inability to provide for mass sport was conceded by the State Secretary for Physical Culture and Sport, Günter Erbach, in response, albeit as late as December 1989, to a petitioner from Leipzig lamenting the lack of opportunities for sport in the local residential area and school. Erbach openly acknowledged that investment in buildings, primarily for top-level sport, had seriously disadvantaged mass sport and that a fundamental policy reappraisal was required. This was a nettle that had not been grasped soon enough.[55]

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[51] McDougall, *The People's Game*, 135–140.
[52] Fetzer, "Die gesellschaftliche Akzeptanz," 337–338.
[53] Hans Joachim Teichler, "Sportstättenbau in den 80er Jahren," in Teichler and Reinartz, *Das Leistungssportsystem*, 351–356.
[54] Cited in Mike Dennis and Jonathan Grix, *Sport under Communism. Behind the East German "Sports Miracle"* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 163.
[55] Teichler, "Staatsplan," 248.

Erbach's admission had been preceded in an attack on SED sports policy by New Forum shortly before the Berlin Wall fell. Its critique constituted a confluence of the grievances expressed in an uncoordinated manner in *Eingaben* with a public voice that embedded these complaints in a radical attack on one-party dictatorship. New Forum had emerged during the course of 1989 as the main political opposition group from among the many small citizens' groups around the alternative political culture concerned with human rights, gender issues, environmental degradation and peace in the later years of the GDR. Closely monitored and penetrated by Stasi informers, they were deemed to be 'hostile-negative'. In December 1989, New Forum's working group for sport excoriated elite sport as a shiny façade that covered up corruption and misuse of office by the dictatorship of a small political clique and as a means for polishing the image of the GDR despite the inordinate cost. In light of participation rates in sport falling far below those in developed industrial nations and the acute shortages of sports goods, it poured scorn on the assertion that a small group of elite athletes emerge from the millions who practise sport on a regular basis. The very existence of popular sports activities, it continued, owed far less to the SED than to the many hardworking volunteer trainers, referees, administrators and medical practitioners. In conclusion, it urged a separation of sport and SED, a reduction in the financial burden of elite sport and a clarification of the moral, ethical and financial misdemeanours in sport, including doping with anabolic steroids.[56]

Growing Popular Disenchantment with Elite Sport

Although many sources, including *Eingaben*, testify to an appreciation of the achievements of GDR athletes in international sport, the intractable problems of reconciling the competing demands for resources from mass sport fuelled a growing disenchantment with elite sport and its political overseers in the final decade of the Honecker era. Drawing on viewing figures for GDR television sports programmes, Thomas Fetzer has identified a correlation between television consumption and fluctuations in enthusiasm. Global success attracted a large audience between 1973 and 1976 and continued at a high rate before dropping from the mid-1980s onwards.[57] The slackening of enthusiasm may,

[56] Neues Forum Leipzig: Arbeitsgruppe Sport, "Zur Ethik und Moral des Sports," 4 December 1989, doping-archiv.de, accessed 4 March 2024.
[57] Fetzer, "Die gesellschaftliche Akzeptanz," 284–291, 299–302, 347–350.

in part, be attributed to the satiation with continual success but also because the material and human costs of elite sport were becoming ever more apparent. This aligns with what Jan Haut and colleagues have called the diminishing utility for national pride of every additional Olympic medal. On the basis of research around the Rio 2016 Olympics, they claim that whereas a single gold may strongly increase international attention, more frequent winning may lead to inflation and that perceptions are not simply shaped by success but also strongly by doping and other forms of unfairness or arrogance.[58]

Further support for the thesis of declining enthusiasm can be found in the rates of refusal by parents for their children's entry into a Children's and Youth Sports School after the end of three years at one of the many Training Centres. Parental consent was required for delegation to a KJS; it could not be taken for granted. Regarded as one of the crucial components of the GDR 'sports miracle', the KJS system was shrouded in secrecy and kept under close surveillance by the Stasi. In 1989, over 9,000 children attended one of these schools, with two-thirds as boarders. They underwent an intensive and highly demanding training regime, usually in conjunction with one of the elite Sports Clubs, with the ultimate goal of entry into the ranks of the 3,376 national squad members. Reaching the summit brought many potential benefits: a place in higher education, opportunities to travel abroad, privileged access to an apartment, cars and other goods in short supply, financial bonuses for victories in individual and team events, status enhancement as a performer on the world stage, and the satisfaction and enjoyment derived from competitive sport. Such benefits help explain why the system continued to attract high rates of participation until the collapse of SED hegemony, perhaps a small way of saying 'yes'.

Yet the many drawbacks caused great concern among parents for the well-being of their children in the hothouse of talent development and one in which the majority youngsters were ultimately cast aside. Numerous studies were carried out in the GDR, for example, by the Leipzig University for Physical Culture and Sport, which identified the problematic aspects of children's experiences and how these might be rectified to ensure a smoother functioning of the system.[59]

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[58] Jan Haut, Freya Grassmann, Eike Emrich, Tim Mayer, and Christian Pierdzioch, "Heroes at Home, Suspects Abroad? National and International Perceptions of Elite Sport Success," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 37, no. 2 (2020): 133–142, doi: 10.1123/ssj.2018-0157.

[59] Among key studies, whose distribution was restricted to internal use, are: Lotti Baum and Brigitte Reinhardt, "Aufgaben bei der Leitung des Übergangs zur 2. Förderstufe und bei der Leitung des Erziehungs- und Ausbildungsprozesses im Aufbautraining," *Theorie und Praxis des Leistungssports* 20, no. 6 (1982): 22–37; Klaus Rudolph, "Die Einstellung der Eltern zur Belastung der Schüler

This downside of the 'sports miracle' involved: homesickness and separation from the family; a lack of free time; the intense pressures of juggling studies with onerous training schedules; intensive political socialization to produce model socialist personalities; serious risks to mental and physical health; the negative effect of ejection from the system and reintegration into society; overspecialization in a sports discipline; and the intrusion into the private sphere of family and friends by the Stasi. One citizen openly complained about the rejection of a place at a special school because of family relations in the West.[60] Parents' concerns were particularly strong as regards disciplines with a low entry age, such as ice skating and gymnastics, and those closely associated with injury and chronic physical harms, notably boxing, weightlifting, wrestling, luge and ski jumping.[61]

While recruitment to the KJS system was a constant problem for sports planners, the issue became critical during the 1980s and can be related both to the structural crisis in elite sport and wider societal changes. A declining birth rate between 1965 and 1975 and only a modest rise from 1975 onwards resulted in a shortfall in potential recruits and a search for new ways to enhance performance. Recourse was had to heavier training loads and the widespread doping of KJS pupils, both extremely harmful to the health of the youngsters. Even though rigorous efforts were made to keep them in the dark about what substances they were receiving, knowledge about the doping of minors and top athletes and potential side-effects circulated among East Germans via Western TV, the internal grapevine and rumours, and sometimes by youngsters informing their parents.[62] Wiese has shown that the relentless pursuit of medals after the 1972 Munich Olympics led to a sharp rise in the number of minors doped in a frenzy of experimentation and in an uncontrolled manner. At the beginning of the 1980s, planners extended doping to top performers in almost all disciplines at the sports schools.[63]

A change in attitude by parents to elite sport and delegation to a KJS is traceable since the end of the 1970s but especially since the mid-1980s.[64] According to Wiese, the incidence of rejection by parents of a place for their

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an den Kinder- und Jugendsportschulen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Tagesregimes," *Theorie und Praxis des Leistungssports* 12, no. 8 (1974): 47–66.

60 Fetzer, "Die gesellschaftliche Akzeptanz," 344.

61 Ibid., 314–328; Wiese, *Kaderschmieden*, 500–501, 505–512; Grit Hartmann, "Wie das Gold geschmiedet wurde," in *Goldkinder. Die DDR im Spiegel ihres Spitzensports*, ed. Grit Hartmann (Leipzig: Forum Verlag, 1998), 117–126; Baum and Reinhardt, "Aufgaben," 24–28, 34–36.

62 Fetzer, "Die gesellschaftliche Akzeptanz," 322, 327–328.

63 Wiese, *Kaderschmieden*, 477–483, 552.

64 Ibid., 498–499, 505–506, 515.

children at a KJS rose sharply with a consequent loss of talent of 11.4 per cent and 9.6 per cent in 1984 and 1985 respectively.[65] A survey undertaken in 1989 revealed that only 56 per cent of parents and 63 per cent of minors at a Training Centre regarded a KJS place as worth striving for.[66] A caveat is in order, however: rejection of a KJS place fell in 1988 to 6.7 per cent, partly because of greater external pressure on parents and also because quantity was put before quality to compensate for the shortfall. Yet this development could not disguise the disconnection between parents and the value of a KJS placement. Once again, *Eingaben* provide an insight into the negative stance of so many parents. In a petition by members of the Irmler family to a DTSB Regional Executive in 1980, the many difficulties intrinsic to elite sport were conceded but not the inhumanity and callousness of those in positions of responsibility.[67] This encapsulates the ethical crisis of the elite sports system, one which subsequent research and the testimonies of victims have so movingly revealed from experiences of sexual and emotional abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder and other serious long-term health problems.[68]

Agency in Sport: From Skateboarding to Football

The disillusionment with mass sport provision, negativity towards the KJS system, cynicism about the manipulation of football in favour of Mielke's Dynamo Berlin and broader cultural changes all spurred a shift towards independent sports activities. Windsurfing, skateboarding and other autonomous free-time pursuits sprang from grassroots agency and from an attraction to trend sports, many of which spread from the USA and West Germany, thereby defying the

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65 Ibid., 506, 514.

66 Hartmann, "Wie das Gold," 125, 336.

67 Wiese, *Kaderschmieden*, 514.

68 Joseph Tudor, *Synthetic Medals. East German Athletes' Journey to Hell* (Chichester: Pitch Publishing, 2022), 93–107, 186–198; Hans-Joachim Seppelt and Holger Schück, eds., *Anklage: Kinderdoping. Das Erbe des DDR-Sports* (Berlin: Tenea, 1999); Harold J. Freyberger, Jens Netzker, Simon Buhrmann, Anne Drescher, Ines Geipel, Adrian Gallist, and Jochen Buhrmann, "Traumatische Folgen des DDR-Staatsdopings. Erste Ergebnisse aus einem multimodalen Untersuchungsansatz," *Trauma und Gewalt* 12, no. 2 (2018): 116–123; Bettina Rulofs, Katrin Wahnschaffe-Waldhoff, Marilen Neeten, and Annika Söllinger, „Sexualisierte Gewalt und sexueller Kindesmissbrauch im Kontext des Sports. Auswertung der vertraulichen Anhörungen und schriftlichen Berichte der Unabhängigen Kommission zur Aufarbeitung sexuellen Kindesmissbrauchs" (Berlin: Unabhängige Kommission zur Aufarbeitung sexuellen Kindesmissbrauchs, 2022), especially 137–146. Child abuse in GDR swimming is interrogated in a novel by Anne Lauppe-Dunbar, *Dark Mermaids* (Bridgend: Seren, 2015).

binaries and priorities underpinning the official state sports system with its emphasis on international success, strict performance norms and ideological rectitude. Among other sports with a grassroots base were karate, triathlon, bodybuilding, aerobics, track running in the Thuringian Forest, mountaineering in the Soviet Union and rock climbing in Saxon Switzerland.

The SED and DTSB responded in diverse ways to what were mostly minor sports with a small base of enthusiasts: from outright repression by the Stasi to a reluctant and capricious tolerance and a drive to incorporate the groups into the formal organizational structures of the DTSB. In the ongoing battle for freedom of action, some enthusiasts like the rock climbers resisted DTSB plans to incorporate them into state frameworks, whereas the track running organization in Thuringia proved less resilient. A common practice of the authorities to prevent ideological 'contamination' from Western-linked sports was to create new titles such as *Körperkulturistik* for bodybuilding, a terminological shield that failed to deter enthusiasts.[69]

As is discussed below in connection with the agency of football and motor cycling fans and their myriad encounters across socialist and 'imperialist' state borders, these developments, above all in the 1980s, contributed to the melting of the Marxist-Leninist ideological glue that permeated state socialism and to the increasing porosity of the so-called 'anti-fascist' barrier of the Berlin Wall and the broader protective inter-systemic Iron Curtain. This can be interpreted as a way of saying 'no' to arbitrary restrictions on the freedom of travel and on the space for 'doing one's own thing'; these were among the negative aspects of GDR state socialism regularly identified in opinion polling by Infratest and in data compiled by GDR research institutes and pertinent to the fortunes of enthusiasts in informally organized sports such as karate and skateboarding.

A few youthful skateboarders appeared in East Berlin in the mid- to late-1970s; by the close of the 1980s, numbers had increased across the country to about 200 to 300. Closely associated with the American hippie and hip-hop scene and inspired by the Harry Belafonte cult film *Beat Street*, skateboarding established itself in the GDR via West German contacts, especially West Berlin's skate shop, California Sports, that provided information about style and techniques and advice on the construction of boards.[70] As skateboards from the West

[69] Braun, "The People's Sport?" 419–420.

[70] See, above all, Kai Reinhart, "'Concrete Carving on the Berlin Wall'. Skateboarding in East Germany," in *Skateboard Studies*, ed. Konstantin Butz and Christian Peters (London: Koening Books, 2018), 130–150, and Kai Reinhart, "Sport in der Bio-Macht – eine Analyse unterschiedlicher Elemente des Sports im Lichte der Theorien Michel Foucaults," in *Körperführung. Historische Pers-*

were so expensive, East German enthusiasts had to construct their own or seek out second hand ones. Another source of materials and information was Czechoslovakia, where skateboarding benefited from state support and where East Germans could take part in international events such as the Prague Euroskates in the late 1980s.

Unafraid to appear in public in East Berlin, the centre of skateboarding in the GDR, as well as in Dresden, Erfurt and Leipzig, the skateboarders were embedded in the punk scene and other autonomous youth sub-cultures but kept their distance from the mutually antagonistic skinheads. Strongly independent, they fiercely resisted incorporation into the official state sports system with its emphasis on discipline and commitment to SED goals. SED and state organs, antipathetic to the sport's cultural roots in the USA, to the personal links between East and West German skaters and to their challenging appearances in public, deployed police to keep the skaters off the streets and, on occasions, Stasi officers to clamp down on public contests. Despite multiple restrictions, East Berlin skaters staged contests that attracted participants across the GDR and from West Germany between 1987 and 1989. Although numbers were modest, no more than 30 participants at the 1989 contest and predominantly from East and West Berlin, one West Berliner has hailed the event as a historic turning point: "Actually, this was already a unified Berlin, a Berlin where, as a consequence of skateboarding, the Wall no longer existed".[71] This argument only gains traction, however, when similar developments in football, karate and various niche sports are borne in mind.

Karate,[72] although a martial art with cultural roots in East Asia, was denounced by officialdom as a 'murderous' capitalist sport and frowned upon for enticing talented athletes from Olympic sports such as judo, boxing and wrestling.[73] Shodan Axel Dziersk, born in East Berlin in 1950, was the inspiration

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pektiven auf das Verhältnis von Biopolitik und Sport, ed. Stefan Scholl (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2018), 226–238.

[71] Interview with Volker Graetsch, February 2005, in Reinhart, "'Concrete Carving,'" 143.

[72] The main source is Repmann, "Die konfliktreiche Entwicklung," 501–531. See also Braun, "The People's Sport?" 421–423; Anje Rödekamp, "Karate in der DDR – Training im Verborgenen," Karate Dachverband Nordrhein-Westfalen, 7 January 2025, https://karate.nrw/karate-in-der-ddr-training-im-verborgenen; "Axel Dziersk: 'Karate-Kid' der DDR," *Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk*, 7 April 2020, https://www.mdr.de/geschichte/ddr/politik-gesellschaft/sport/karate-axel-dziersk-100.html; Felix Liedtke, "Die Entwicklung des Karate in den letzten Jahren der DDR bis heute," 2010, https://kipf.com/die-entwicklung-des-karate-in-den-letzten-jahren-der-ddr-bis-heute, accessed 19 August 2024; Lars Andersen, "The East German Samurai," *Karate News* (9 December 2021), https://karatenews.dk/the-east-german-Samurai.

[73] Repmann, "Die konfliktreiche Entwicklung," 506–507.

behind the development of karate in the GDR from the 1970s onwards. Despite being kept under surveillance by forty-four Stasi informers,[74] he popularized karate moves as a stuntman, along with other enthusiasts, in TV and cinema films and acted as a contact person for information about the sport.[75] Alarmed by its growing popularity, the DTSB banned karate, as well as yoga, in 1979, driving the small, informal groups underground into cellars, attics and other clandestine training places.

Yet it was easier to issue than to enforce the ban for, despite the close attention of the Stasi, numbers increased to at least 2,280 by late 1988.[76] Illegal regional groups were established, and training manuals and other forbidden literature were obtained from the West, often by means of senior-age family members such as Dziersk's mother. On occasions, university students formed small martial arts groups, sometimes, as at Halle, inspired by the activities of fellow students from Vietnam.[77] Activists even managed to arrange for trainers from West Germany to cross into the GDR, notably a visit in 1985 by Sensei Hideo Ochi, a Japanese master of karate and trainer to the West German national team.[78] As in other sports, exchanges took place with karateka in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, where the sport was not banned. Karate also penetrated the football scene, where skinhead supporters of Dynamo Berlin engaged in karate, partly in preparation for clashes with opposing fans.

Although some members of the armed and security forces practised karate on their own initiative before elements of the sport were incorporated into hand-to-hand combat training programmes of special units,[79] intermittent repression continued throughout the 1980s. In 1987, a major training course at Ahlbeck was banned and the organizers imprisoned by the Wolgast police office.[80] There is evidence, however, that by the mid-1980s many karate activists were becoming bolder, a feature observable in other sports. Petitions, sometimes as part of an organized campaign, were despatched to the offices of Ewald, Krenz and Honecker seeking the legalization of the sport, with attention being drawn to the legality of karate in Poland and Czechoslovakia. In 1987–1988, Krenz was

[74] "Axel Dziersk," 1.
[75] Repmann, "Die konfliktreiche Entwicklung," 504–505, 508.
[76] Ibid., 509, fn. 29. Repmann argues that numbers were certainly higher than this figure.
[77] Theo Austermühle, *Vom Studentensport zum Hochschulsport* (Aachen: Meyer and Meyer, 2000), 16, 21, 99–103.
[78] Andersen, "The East-German Samurai," 7–9.
[79] Repmann, "Die konfliktreiche Entwicklung," 516–519.
[80] Ibid., 510–513. Other training courses had been held at Seebad Ahlbeck on the island of Usedom in 1985 that attracted well over 100 participants from across the GDR.

the recipient of *Eingaben* from a group complaining about the lack of state support and being made to feel like criminals, charges which triggered meetings and numerous letters between officials and group members.[81] Petitioners even resorted to thinly veiled threats: in an *Eingabe* addressed to Honecker in July 1987, Hilmar Ortleb contended that by refusing to legalize the sport, the state would lose any chance of controlling it; he underpinned his demand by pointing out that while 600 practitioners owned illegal weapons [with reference to karate], the state did not even know the names of ten per cent.[82] The ban on karate was finally lifted in February 1989, soon after Klaus Eichler replaced Ewald as head of the DTSB. Although activists could now practise openly and, on 25 October, hold their first GDR tournament in Leipzig, the sport was placed under the organizational umbrella of the Judo Association. This and other restrictions underline officialdom's distrust of autonomous cultural forms, in this case from the Far East, and of its prioritization of elite sport.

If minority niche sports such as karate, skateboarding and triathlon could defy the imposition of the values and structures of SED and DTSB, then football culture and club traditions presented an even greater challenge to authoritarian dictates. The game's mass appeal, its sheer unpredictability and its strong cultural significance at local, regional and national level enabled football to attain a degree of autonomy and to accommodate low levels of resistance that sometimes erupted into violence. In addition, the magnetic appeal of *Bundesliga* clubs and the frequency of personal contacts between East and West German fans across the Berlin Wall and in neighbouring state socialist countries testified to the prevalence of agency in football and to the emasculation of SED efforts to create a distinctive GDR identity.

The cultural significance of football and its roots in diverse individual and collective identities can be gauged from the generous sponsorship of local teams by high-ranking SED and government officials as well as by heads of large industrial complexes such as the Carl Zeiss Optics conglomerate. The most notorious example of high-level patronage was that of the Minister of State Security, Erich Mielke, for his favourite team Berlin Football Club Dynamo (henceforth Dynamo Berlin). The ten-year run of success of his team as Oberliga champions from 1979 onwards deeply antagonized fans of rival clubs, not least those of the well-supported Dynamo Dresden. Not only was there a clash of regional affiliations in the latter instance – a case of Prussia versus

[81] Ibid., 519–524; Dennis and Grix, *Sport under Communism*, 75–76.
[82] Repmann, "Die konfliktreiche Entwicklung," 521–522; Braun, "The People's Sport?" 422–423.

Saxony – but also the widespread view that Dynamo Berlin's success owed much to dubious decisions by so-called 'bent' referees, its superior training facilities, its links with the Stasi and its arbitrary recruitment of players from other clubs.[83] Research conducted in 1987 by the Leipzig Central Institute for Youth Research found that it was by far the most unpopular club in the country, followed at some distance by Union Berlin. Union's low rating was attributed to an aversion against the city of Berlin and to the team's rough playing style. In contrast, Lok Leipizig, Carl Zeiss Jena and Dynamo Dresden and Magdeburg recorded high rates of approval.[84]

Letters of complaints poured in from officials and countless supporters of other clubs, especially, according to Leske, in 1985–1986.[85] Accusations, often from SED members, focused on decisions favouring the East Berliners with regard to offside, penalties, additional playing time, fouls and player dismissals. A Zwickau fan protested to Ewald about manipulation, deceit and daylight robbery in the upper tier of the league[86] and a fan from Dresden warned Honecker in 1985 that poor decision making damaged the reputation of the SED, the capital city and sports functionaries among young people.[87] The visceral antipathy to Mielke's club and referees was expressed in dramatic manner in an anonymous letter to the East German Football Association from a self-styled circle of terrorists; referees were threatened with damage to their bungalows, cars and garages if they did not cease manipulating results in favour of Dynamo.[88]

Mielke did not respond well to criticism. In a briefing paper for a meeting with Ewald and Rudi Hellmann, the head of the Central Committee Sports Department, on 31 March 1986, he protested against the unjustified 'hate-filled mood' against his team and warned that Oberliga games and referees' performances should not be misused by 'hostile-negative, politically indifferent,

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[83] For a detailed analysis, see Leske, *Erich Mielke*, 468–546.

[84] "S6096: Jugend und Sport 1987," Codebuch (DJI-Studien-nr.: A46), 1.0.0, 2010-04-13, GESIS Datenarchiv, doi: 10.4232/1.6096, A46 0212, A46 0221, accessed 27 August 2024; Hans-Jörg Stiehler, "Neuere Ergebnisse zum Verhältnis Jugendlicher zum Fußball (Fanverhalten): Expertise zur Untersuchung 'Sport 87'," ZIJ Leipzig, 1988, 2, 10–13, https://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-402772. On the international scene, the national teams of the Federal Republic, Brazil, Argentina, Denmark and the Soviet Union were highly popular and among club teams, above all Bayern Munich and, to a lesser extent, Hamburg: see ibid., 7–10. 2,606 young people took part in the research project.

[85] Leske, *Erich Mielke,* 497.

[86] Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (SAPMO-BArchiv), DY 12/3341, Letter to Ewald, 27 September 1982.

[87] Leske, *Erich Mielke*, 498.

[88] The letter, dated January 1982, is printed in Suckut, ed., *Volkes Stimmen*, 320–321.

politically ill-advised and malleable forces' to drive a wedge between the people and the police and security forces.[89] While there is no evidence of direct instructions from Mielke's ministry for referees to favour the Berlin team, popular perceptions of bias were decisive and reflected alienation from the game and reinforced belief in endemic corruption in society as in football.

Much to the chagrin of the Dynamo Sports Association leadership, the hostility towards the Berlin team was not confined to letters of protest but was expressed openly in football stadia and surrounding areas. This echoes what Robert Edelman has called a small way of saying 'no' in the Soviet Union to a club attached to the army or police, as in the case of ordinary people's support for Moscow Spartak rather than the elitist Moscow Dynamo[90] and it is not untypical of stadia as places of contestation and protest in other authoritarian regimes.[91] Highly provocative cries in East German stadia of "Bent champions", "Stasi out" and "The fuzz are work shy" encapsulated a widespread disillusionment with a game pervaded by strong political antipathies.

Highly embarrassing for Mielke and his ministerial colleagues was the reaction to the flight of Lutz Eigendorf, one of the stars of Dynamo Berlin, who remained in West Germany after a friendly match against Kaiserslautern in 1979. He died in a motor car accident in 1983, due, it has been alleged – but without sufficient proof – to Stasi machinations. Other Dynamo players, Falz Götz and Dirk Schlegel, would take the escape route to the West. Taunts echoed around the stadia of "Where is Eigendorf?" or "Want to bolt to the West, Dynamo is best". Fans of Union Berlin recall other inflammatory cries: "Scheiß Osten!", a reflection of disgust with the GDR, and, at free kicks, "The wall must go", a less than subtle reference to the Berlin Wall itself.[92] Given the almost universal hostility towards Dynamo, perhaps it might be argued, that it was partly to blame for the fall of the Wall, not just, as the writer and a loyal fan Andreas Gläser contends, a scapegoat for its original construction.[93]

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[89] BStU, MfS, ZA, ZAIG, no. 27057, "Hinweise für die Gesprächsführung mit dem Präsidenten des DTSB, Genossen Ewald, und dem Leiter der Abteilung Sport im ZK der SED, Genossen Hellmann," [March 1986], 2–4.

[90] Robert Edelman, "A Small Way of Saying 'No'": Moscow Working Men, Spartak Soccer and the Communist Party, 1900–1945," *American Historical Review* 107, no. 5 (2002): 1442, doi: 10.1086/ahr/107.5.1441.

[91] For a general survey, see Jean-Michel De Waele, "Introduction: soccer under authoritarian regimes," *Soccer and Society* 21, no. 6 (2020): 1–14, doi: 10.1080/14660970.2020.1775048.

[92] See the interview with Dall in Hahn and Willmann, *Stadionpartisanen*, 88.

[93] Andreas Gläser, *Der BFC war schuld am Mauerbau. Ein stolzer Sohn des Proletariats erzählt* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003).

Union Berlin were Dynamo's fiercest rival and matches were frequently the scene of violence both inside and outside the stadia. Intra-city hostilities were not uncommon, as was the case between Leipzig fans of the underdogs Chemie and those of the far more successful Lok, but none were more deep-rooted than in the capital. In contrast to Dynamo, Union was the proverbial yo-yo team, securing only one major honour, the FDGB cup in 1968. Located on the outskirts of the city, Union commanded a loyal and dedicated set of supporters and a reputation in the 1980s for harbouring punks and other non-conformist youth. The notion of Union as a 'genuine' club in visceral opposition to Dynamo was fundamental to its well-cultivated image as underdog, as is encapsulated in the post-unification remarks of one supporter, Lopez: "We stood in the shadow of the pigs of BFC, Stasi, police and Mielke and were always the downtrodden team. I don't even find it cool to be number one".[94] Although a culture of defiance was palpable, it would be mistaken to depict Union as a club in opposition to the state socialist system. It belonged to the high-performance group of football clubs created in 1966 and was sponsored by the state-owned Oberspree Cable Plant. What Union represented, however, was a strong identification with the local working-class suburb of Köpenick and a space for fan behaviour incompatible with that of the all-round socialist personality nurtured by SED political educationalists.

The return of Union Berlin to the Oberliga in 1970 and the seriousness of clashes with Dynamo fans turned what had been mostly low-key and ritualistic violence in the past into a broad societal issue and the launching of a Stasi special operation to prevent a reoccurrence of rioting by Union supporters.[95] Despite this operation and a plethora of measures against what the Stasi defined as 'negative-decadent' forces, a labelling that also encompassed skinheads, punks, rock fans and metalheads, 'hooliganism' was far from quelled. The 1980s marked a rapid escalation in widespread football-related violence with a spiralling of state concern and engagement. The most serious offences, whether in Leipzig, East Berlin, Rostock or Dresden, consisted of damage to train coaches, stadia and public facilities and physical assaults on other fans, spectators and passers-by.

From the mid-1980s, the infiltration of the football scene by skinheads inaugurated a shift towards a more militant and racist terrace culture. A common

[94] Jörn Luther and Frank Willmann, *Und niemals vergessen – Eisern Union!* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 2000), 136.
[95] BStU, ZA, HA VIII, no. 925, vol. 14, 6–8, 12–14.

interest in football served as a link not only among skinheads across the GDR but also with those in Hungary, West Germany and Czechoslovakia.[96] The emergence, by the late 1980s, of a hybrid of xenophobia, hyper-nationalism and anti-communism among a section of the skinheads was particularly difficult to explain in a state whose legitimacy was in part founded on its anti-fascist myth. While skinheads were relatively few in number, thirty to forty were attached to the two Berlin clubs in December 1985, a crackdown across the GDR two years later and infiltration by the Stasi failed to crush them. Indeed, the FDGB cup final between Dynamo Berlin and Carl Zeiss Jena in East Berlin in June 1988 was the scene of some of the most serious violence ever witnessed at a GDR football game.[97]

The radicalization of hooliganism prompted the Stasi to increase its efforts to recruit informers among the hard-core and other 'negative-decadent' fans as a means for identifying the leaders and contacts with West German skinheads and hooligans. But, as a dissertation on Lok Leipzig fans compiled by a Stasi officer revealed, recruitment was difficult as material incentives were ineffective and the hard core were dismissive of appeals to socialist convictions and opposed to snitching on their mates.[98] As Stasi officers and criminologists were left bemused in the absence of any direct steering of the skinheads and the hard-core fans by 'imperialist' agencies, the ministry fell back on the convenient but ultimately misconceived notion of political-ideological subversion in the form of Western media transmissions, postal networks and the many personal links between East and West German fans across state borders.

Lifting the Curtain, Lowering the Wall

A regular flow of personal contacts across borders hitherto protected by fortifications and by stringent passport regimes became a common feature of Cold War Europe from the early 1970s in the wake of a series of international accords. Among the major agreements affecting the GDR were the Four Power

[96] BStU, ZA, HA XX, no. 898, "Einschätzung über die in der DDR existierenden Skinheads bzw. Skinheadgruppen," East Berlin, 16 December 1987, 27–29.

[97] BStU, ZA, JHS, no. 21493, Rainer Taraschoneck, "Diplomarbeit zum Thema: Erfordernisse der Erziehung und Befähigung von inoffiziellen Mitarbeitern (IM) zur operativen Bearbeitung von rechtsextremistischen Erscheinigungen unter Jugendlichen der Hauptstadt," 1989, 14; also BStU, ZA, HA IX, no. 1303, "Informationen," 69–70.

[98] BStU, ZA, JHS, 21466, Dirk Kreklau, "Diplomarbeit zum Thema: Die Gewinnung Jugendlicher und jungerwachsener IM aus dem negativ-dekadenten Fußballanhang und die kontinuierliche Zusammenarbeit mit ihnen," Leipzig, 31 March 1989, 5, 13, 18–24, 29, 31–33, 36.

Agreement on Berlin and the Basic Treaty between the two German Republics in 1972. While the Basic Treaty was a landmark agreement, it did not entail full or *de jure* recognition of GDR sovereignty and Bonn continued to promote the concept of two states in one nation and to recognize the right to citizenship of East Germans settling in the FRG. The SED response, as part of its general *Abgrenzung* or demarcation strategy from the Federal Republic, was the unrolling of its highly contentious thesis of the development of the socialist nation in the GDR primarily on the basis of socialist conditions of production, Marxist-Leninist ideology and the political power of the working class under its Marxist-Leninist party. Not the least of the many challenges arising from the amelioration in relations was an enormous surge in private East-West German connections and entanglements. In 1973, over 6 million visits were paid by West Germans and West Berliners to the GDR in contrast to the 1.25 million only two years earlier. East German senior citizens were by far the greatest beneficiaries on the GDR side with visits escalating to 3.8 million and 6.7 million in 1987 and 1988 respectively.

While it was virtually impossible for East Germans, other than seniors, to attend matches in the Federal Republic, Westerners were free to cross the border to follow games in the GDR capital.[99] Although the construction of the Berlin Wall severed attendance by Easterners at Hertha Berlin home games, contacts between Union and Hertha fans remained close with East Berlin members of the small Hertha-Eastern society holding clandestine meetings at pubs in the Pankow and Prenzlauer Berg districts. Perhaps the most remarkable of these fans was Helmut Klopfleisch, a Berliner, who by the early 1970s, was travelling all over Eastern Europe to watch Hertha, Bayern Munich and the West German national team. His frequent travels and personal contacts with players and trainers such as Franz Beckenbauer and Helmut Schön soon caught the attention of the Stasi. Interrogated in Hohenschönhausen prison in East Berlin and with his wife and son also subjected to a typical Stasi dirty-tricks campaign, the family ultimately left the GDR in the summer of 1989.

[99] On links between Hertha Berlin and Union Berlin fans, see René Wiese, "Wie der Fußball Löcher in die Mauer schoss – Die Ost-West Alltagskultur des Fußballs in Berlin (1961–1990)," in *Sportsstadt Berlin im Kalten Krieg. Prestigekämpfe und Systemwettstreit*, ed. Jutta Braun and Hans Joachim Teichler (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2006), 236–284; Wiese and Braun, *Doppelpässe*, 48–50, 59–60, 80–85; Dariusz Wojtaszyn, "Between East and West. Football in Divided Berlin," in *Football Politics in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Roland Benedikter and Dariusz Wojtaszyn (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020), 123–136.

Stasi surveillance notwithstanding, the relaxation of travel restrictions in the early 1970s enabled Hertha fans to venture more frequently into the GDR capital for Union Berlin home games, above all for the potentially explosive derby against Dynamo Berlin. Mutual forms of identity were expressed in songs and chants and the wearing of the other club's scarves and caps. In a highly provocative act, Hertha fans sold badges with the phrase "We will stick together, nothing can separate us, neither wall nor barbed wire". Another challenging political message, "Hertha und Union – eine Nation" was transmitted on head gear and cries of "Deutschland! Deutschland!" were highly disturbing reminders for the SED of a common German identity and a protest against the SED thesis of the GDR as a separate socialist nation.[100]

Cross border encounters also escalated with the GDR's East European neighbours, above all as a result of the 1972 Border of Friendship Agreement with Poland and Czechoslovakia. Whereas travel had been less restrictive to Hungary, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, especially for Western tourists, the 1972 accord led to millions of citizens of the three countries travelling as independent tourists with a police-issued personal identification card. Although non-organized travel had occurred before 1972, such as to beaches and mountains, the three governments responded to pressures for the liberalization of travel to underpin the embryonic social contract and to foster transnational friendships and regional economic cooperation. Numbers exploded with 6,774,069 East Germans visiting Poland and 5,821,507 Czechoslovakia in 1972.[101]

Camping, consumer tourism, music festivals and sports events were among the main attractions, with young people to the fore. East German sports fans took advantage of the new situation to watch West German teams in action in European competitions, often meeting up with fans from the West. The Stasi reckoned about 5,000 East German fans attended the thirteen games played by Bundesliga clubs and the West German national team in Eastern Europe between March 1979 and March 1981. Numbers ranged from the 50 at the Baník Ostrava game against Fortuna Düsseldorf to the 2,000 who watched Bayern Munich against Bohemians Prague. When Bayern met Baník Ostrava in the quarter-final of the European Cup in 1981, the 1,000 or so East Germans formed a solid bloc

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[100] Interview with Crille in Luther and Willmann, *Und niemals vergessen*, 138.

[101] Mark Keck-Szajbel, "A Cultural Shift in the 1970s: 'Texas' Jeans, Taboos and Transnational Tourism," *East European Politics and Societies, and Cultures* 29, no. 1 (2015), 2, doi: 10.1177/0888325415572257; Mark Keck-Szajbel, "The Borders of Friendship: Transnational Travel and Tourism in the East Bloc, 1972–1989" (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2013), 3, 7, 13–14, 22, 28, 30, 43, 58, 62–63, 140.

of support for Bayern in one section of the ground. Many had received tickets from the Bayern manager and intermediaries.[102]

A well-coordinated venture occurred in March 1979, when several thousand East and West Berliners, half of them Union fans, travelled to watch Hertha Berlin against Dukla Prague in a UEFA semi-final cup game. A group of Hertha fans departed from Bahnhof Zoo in West Berlin, joined up with Union fans at Friedrichstrasse before continuing on to Prague where the West Berliners purchased tickets for their GDR counterparts.[103] Regular encounters across state borders and open expressions of support for a Bayern Munich or the West German national team all served as highly uncomfortable remainders for the SED of the persistence of an all-German socio-cultural community as channelled through the powerful medium of football and other sports. These primarily autonomous, transnational contacts also underline the growing permeability of Cold War borders and the pressure imposed on states to recalibrate the bureaucratic components of border regimes.

Border regimes and guards were challenged by another mass sport exodus, that of tens of thousands of East German motorcycle enthusiasts to Czechoslovakia for the annual Grand Prix event at Brno. Motor cycling was highly popular in the GDR with the annual international competition held at the famous Bergringrennen in the small town of Teterow in the Mecklenburg region the highpoint of the year's calendar. Until the SED imposed a ban on Western competitors in 1972, the event attracted riders from West Germany, Great Britain and as far away as Australia. As at the Teterow event, the appearance of 'negative-decadent' youth at Brno set in motion surveillance and disciplinary measures by the Stasi and police, triggered by an innate hostility towards non-conformist youth whether metalheads, skinheads, rock and Blues fans or simply beer drinkers who took Honecker's consumer socialism to excess. The camaraderie between East and West Germans also aroused suspicion, especially, as in 1981, when motorcycling fans from both countries shouted "Deutschland! Deutschland!" and sang the West German national anthem. Clashes between the Czechoslovak security forces and youthful fans led to a minor riot and several were handed over to the Stasi.[104]

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[102] BStU, MfS, Außenstelle Frankfurt (Oder), BdL, no. 1654, „Zusammenfassende Darstellung," East Berlin, June 1981, 15–16, 23.

[103] Interview with Franco in Luther and Willmann, *Und niemals vergessen*, 98–99.

[104] Caroline Fricke, "Getting off Track in East Germany: Adolescent Motorcycle Fans and Honecker's Consumer Socialism," in *Socialist Escapes. Breaking Away from Ideology and Everyday Routine in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*, ed. Cathleen M. Giustino, Catherine J. Plum, and Alexander Vari (New York: Berghahn, 2013), 217–218, 221–224.

Close East-West interactions could not be suppressed: in 1985, according to a Stasi informer, IM "Wagner", East Germans had enthusiastically sung the West German national anthem and supported Western riders, especially those from the FRG.[105] As late as June 1989, the Stasi elaborated plans to control East German motorcycle fans in advance of the Brno event in August. Called 'Aktion Cross', the overall planning emanated from the office of Mielke's second-in-command, Rudi Mittig, and envisaged, as in earlier years, close cooperation between the ministry's regional units and its departments for passport control, youth and sport, tourism and interrogation. The goal was to forestall personal contacts between East and West Germans and what the ministry regarded as 'undesirables' from going to Brno, that is, 'negative-decadent' and 'hostile-negative' persons. These included applicants who wished to leave the GDR. Stasi and Czechoslovak security forces were to cooperate on dealing with criminal offences committed by East Germans and informers were to be recruited to provide information from inside the various fan groups.[106] The sheer futility of such operations was soon brought into focus a few weeks later when, in August 1989, the West German embassy in Prague was occupied by East Germans intent on exiting the GDR.

Exit and Fall

Diverse cross border encounters in sport or other spheres of interest, whether in the GDR or in Eastern Europe, helped meet East Germans' wish for greater opportunities for travel as testified in Infratest polling and in letters to the authorities. The relaxation of restrictions, however, was so carefully circumscribed that it failed to dissuade East Germans from wishing to settle in the Federal Republic. From the construction of the Wall to the end of 1988, 616,000 left for the West, of whom 238,000 fled without permission, a high risk venture as border guards were under instructions to use firearms if flight could not otherwise be prevented. The signing of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975 acted as a powerful spur to apply for official permission to leave the GDR and soon promoted the emergence of a mass migration

[105] BStU, MfS, BV Suhl, BdL, no. 1545, "Plan der politisch-operativen Maßnahmen zur Sicherung der Touristen aus der DDR und zur Unterstützung des tschechoslowakischen Bruderorgans bei der Gewährleistung von Sicherheit und Ordnung anläßlich der Weltmeisterschaftsläufe für Motorräder und Seitenwagen und um den Grand Prix der CSSR in Brno/CSSR," 12 June 1989, 11, 13.

[106] Ibid., 1–14.

movement that the SED found increasingly difficult to control. In a vain attempt to defuse the situation, about 35,000 citizens were given permission to leave the GDR in 1984; a further 6,000 fled the country.[107]

Sport was deeply embedded in illegal exit.[108] An estimated 615 sports persons, the actual figure is certainly higher, including those from the Society for Sport and Technology, managed to flee the GDR between 1950 and August 1989. According to Stasi data on defection in top-level sport by athletes, trainers and medical personnel, 233 fled between 1960 and 1966, 47 between 1966 and 1978, and 24 between 1979 and 1985.[109] The Stasi and SED were most anxious to prevent defection by what were denounced as 'sports traitors' as not only did it risk the leaking of sports secrets, notably doping, but it was also highly damaging to the prestige of the GDR. Some sports scientists, such as Alois Mader and Hartmut Riedel, found employment in West German sports institutes that could draw upon their inside knowledge of doping and other sports-related programmes.[110]

Defection usually took place beyond the borders of the GDR, especially in West Germany, and was most common among field and track athletes, rowers and footballers. Among the main motives were the salary and status attached to competing in the West, dissatisfaction with social conditions in the GDR and politically determined career obstacles. Whereas the number defecting ranged between a mere three and six per annum until 1987, the numbers then rose sharply to 17 in 1988 and 19 until August 1989.[111] The most prominent figure to defect was Jürgen Sparwasser, the scorer of the GDR's winning goal against West Germany in the famous 1974 World Cup encounter. Although he managed to flee with his wife while at a seniors' football tournament in Saarbrücken, his daughter was subjected in the GDR to harassment by the Stasi.[112] Others faced similar machinations by the Stasi, with the experiences of the Dynamo Berlin

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[107] Bernd Eisenfeld, "Die Ausreisebewegung – eine Erscheinungsform widerständigen Verhaltens," in *Zwischen Selbstbehauptung und Anpassung in der DDR*, ed. Ulrike Poppe, Rainer Eckert, and Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk (Berlin: Christoph Links, 1995), 192–193, 214.

[108] Jutta Braun and René Wiese, "'Tracksuit Traitors': Eastern German Top Athletes on the Run," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31, no. 2 (2014): 1519–1534, doi: 10.1080/09523367.2014.922549.

[109] BStU, ZA, HA XX, no. 14798, "Die Hauptangriffsrichtungen gegen die Sportpolitik der DDR," 13–14.

[110] Michael Krüger, Christian Becker, and Stefan Nielsen, *German Sports, Doping, and Politics. A History of Sport Performance Enhancement* (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield, 2015), 84–87, 120.

[111] BStU, *MfS und Leistungssport. Ein Recherchebericht*, Reihe A: Dokumente, no. 1 (Berlin: BStU, 1994), 30.

[112] Leske, *Erich Mielke*, 377–382; Jürgen Schwarz and Frank Müller, *Freigespielt. DDR-Fußballer auf der Flucht* (Dresden: Saxophon, 2015), 113–115.

footballer Lutz Eigendorf perhaps the most extreme. Some, like the Dynamo Dresden footballer Frank Lippmann and the star ski-jumper and sports medicine expert Hans-Georg Aschenbach, would find, after consulting their Stasi files, that the ministry had concocted plans to kidnap them.[113] While top-level sport may well have been underrepresented among defectors as a career in the GDR entailed intense ideological indoctrination, tight surveillance and monitoring, and status, material and other personal benefits,[114] the adverse publicity, at least for the SED, surrounding what was often spectacular escapes, fed into the pressures of mass exodus that culminated in the opening of the Berlin Wall on the evening of 9th November 1989.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, the collapse of SED hegemony lay in the fundamental reappraisal of Cold War verities by the Soviet leadership under Gorbachev that precipitated bold calls for political, economic and security change throughout Eastern Europe. Despite increasingly desperate attempts by an obdurate SED leadership to distance the country from reform, the old regime was eventually overwhelmed by the attraction for many East Germans of the consumer glitz of West Germany, the frequency of personal links with West Germans, the financial and social consequences of economic depression and a loss of faith in socialism as a progressive force. Although polling data signposted these developments and the gradual erosion of support for the 'other Germany', the place of sport in the decline and fall narrative is captured more effectively from a micro-perspective. Sport's role lay primarily in its intersection with popular protests over the prioritization of top-level sport over underfunded mass forms of participation, disenchantment with the financial, moral and health costs of the top-performance sports model, and with the shift towards greater individualization in lifestyles.

The latter point was taken up in a searching appraisal of the crisis in society by Walter Friedrich, the head of the GDR's most prestigious social science institute, the Leipzig Central Institute for Youth Research.[115] He warned Egon

[113] On Lippmann, see Schwarz and Müller, *Freigespielt*, 104. On Aschenbach, see Aschenbach, *Euer Held*, 155–163, 173. Aschenbach's 90-year-old-grandmother, Lene, was put under surveillance.

[114] Hans Joachim Teichler, "Sportpolitik 1989/1990," in Teichler and Reinartz, *Das Leistungssportsystem*, 410–412.

[115] Friedrich, "Mentalitätswandel," 25–37; Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, "*Vorwärts immer, rückwärts nimmer!" Interne Dokumente zum Verfall der SED und DDR 1988/90* (Berlin: Dietz, 1994), 39, 44–46; Martin Sabrow, "Socialism as *Sinnwelt*: Communist Dictatorship and its World of Meaning in a Cultural-Historical Perspective," in *Making Sense of Dictatorship. Domination and Everyday Life*

Krenz, in 1987, that the cardinal issue – the onset of a cultural revolution among young people – was more problematic than the economic malaise. This manifested itself, according to Friedrich, in a growing self-awareness and a desire to determine their own lives free of SED and FDJ control, an individualization that was reflected in greater involvement in informal cliques, unofficial peace groups and the pursuit of leisure activities beyond the reach of officialdom. To blame the 'class enemy' for the alienation of young people was both simplistic and a barrier to reform. As discussed above, support for Friedrich's thesis is found in the exercise of agency in minor sports and football in the face of regulation and repression. The surge in private West-East sports encounters across the Berlin Wall and in Eastern Europe were other significant contributory factors in deconstructing the ideological infrastructure of state socialism and in the demolition of its concrete protective barrier. What lay ahead was unification and a radical transformation of the state socialist system, including the dismantlement of the high-performance sports Leviathan.

in East Central Europe after 1945, ed. Celia Donert, Ana Kladnik, and Martin Sabrow (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022), 16.