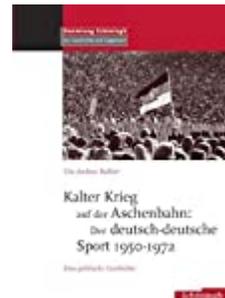




Uta Andrea Balbier. *Kalter Krieg auf der Aschenbahn: Der deutsch-deutsche Sport 1950-1972, Eine politische Geschichte.* Paderborn: Ferdinand Schoeningh, 2007. 260 pp. EUR 32.90 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-506-75616-9.



Reviewed by Chris Mack (Department of History, SUNY Oswego)

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Playing Along: Sport and State in the Two Germanies

With this book, Uta Andrea Balbier provides a well-researched, well-written, and thought-provoking study of the politics of sport in the FRG and GDR from 1952 to 1972. She successfully demonstrates that despite initial differences between East German and West German sport ideologies and approaches, in the end, sport and political leaders recognized the value of sport in the promotion of distinct national identities and political ambitions. Thus, both states came increasingly to politicize sport and created firm connections between state interests and those of the leaders of their countries' sport movement.

After an introductory section describing the particular problems uncovered and the methods to be employed in addressing them, Balbier follows a primarily chronological path through the remaining chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on the resumption of international sport activity through participation in the Olympic Games by the FRG and the GDR. Chapter 2 details the changing direction of sport in the FRG during the 1960s, the destructive consequences of the erection of the Berlin Wall on sport relations between the two states, and the importance of the Tokyo games of 1964 in finally severing Olympic co-

operation between them. The third chapter considers in detail the growing similarities between the two nations with regard to sport and its political uses, especially as the FRG began increasingly to view sport as an appropriate political weapon and embraced the importance and political possibilities of success in elite international sport. The chapter also examines the 1968 Mexico City games, the first summer games in which the two German states competed separately. Chapter 4 focuses on structural changes that took place in both the FRG and the GDR to strengthen and promote elite athletic success even further. It also deals with ideological critiques leveled against elite, high-performance sport by the New Left. The fifth and final chapter considers the 1972 Munich games and its political uses by FRG sport and political officials; correspondingly, Balbier explains the strategy offered by GDR officials as simultaneously criticizing the FRG and its efforts as host of the games, while still utilizing the games as an important way to make its own political statements.

One of the strengths of Balbier's work is her clear presentation of what her study is and what it is not. In the

introductory section, she carefully sets out that despite her focus on the relationship between sport and politics, the book will not focus on doping in the GDR or the 1972 hostage crisis and its tragic aftermath. Rather, she focuses on the ways that sport and state policies ended by becoming intertwined and how a convergence of aims and ambitions led to similar attitudes toward sport and its uses in both the GDR and the FRG.

That such a convergence would occur was not a foregone conclusion. According to Balbier, while the leaders of the GDR quickly embraced sport as a means of forging a “New Socialist Man” and began to focus resources and attention in that direction, the FRG lagged behind. In large measure, the hesitation to follow the GDR’s lead in the West was due to ideological considerations and the dodgy relationship between sport and state left to the FRG as a National Socialist legacy. As a result, FRG political officials initially held sport to be a personal and individual affair aimed at promoting not state power and prowess, but personal health and well-being. Such an attitude certainly distanced the FRG from the strong ties between state and sport under Nazism, but did little to foster German athletes’ success as they re-joined the Olympic and international sport community beginning in 1952.

In the runup to the 1952 Helsinki games, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), led by President Avery Brundage, refused to recognize the existence of two separate German teams. Rather, they demanded that the two German states cooperate and field a common team. The FRG complied, albeit under protest, while the GDR did not. As a result, the German team at Helsinki consisted solely of athletes drawn from the FRG. Forced to play by IOC rules, the GDR capitulated and from 1956 through 1964 the German team at the Olympics included athletes from both states. Balbier does an excellent job of describing the animosity between the two sides, which was only exacerbated after 1961, and their attempts to sever their troubled union. In addition, she points out persuasively that FRG officials recognized early that competition with GDR athletes would demand the overhaul of their sport structure and system. This necessity was especially apparent in the wake of the Tokyo games in 1964, when athletes from the GDR outnumbered those from the FRG for the first time. Also, the combined team performed miserably, while athletes from the United States and USSR set numerous records, which led to a major re-evaluation of

sports programs and institutional support in both German countries.

A further strength of Balbier’s text is her examination of the institutional structures and relationships within the sporting communities in both states. She demonstrates how both systems fostered strong leaders, Willi Daume in the FRG and Manfred Ewald in the GDR, and the maneuvers each performed to increase his own power and prerogative. Both leaders worked tirelessly to persuade political officials of the importance international sport success played in fashioning national identity and projecting international prominence. To achieve their ambitions, each did his level best to increase the money his respective government was willing to devote to the pursuit of sporting success. Ewald set the bar very high, creating the seemingly ubiquitous machine that identified athletic talent among East German children, then educated them, trained them, and ultimately doped them to unprecedented success. According to Balbier, Daume did his best, although never on the same scale or with the same callousness.

Perhaps the weakest section of the book, which is only relative, is Balbier’s discussion of the New Left and its criticisms of the turn in both states toward pursuit of gold medals and international elite sport in the 1960s. Although broadly correct in her interpretation of the New Left critics’ arguments against the de-humanizing affects of elite, high-performance sport, Balbier devotes too little space to the theme to allow more than a cursory investigation of the issues at hand. One cannot disagree with her conclusion, however, that the efforts of New Left critics gained little popular support and that they represented the last sustained attempt to de-emphasize elite sport significantly in favor of a broader, non-competitive, mass sport movement.

In sum, Balbier has indeed produced a valuable addition to our understanding of the dynamics of sport and politics as they played out between the GDR and the FRG during the period 1952-72. Well-researched and carefully argued, her study greatly facilitates our understanding of the internal and external considerations that shaped the decisions of sport and political leaders in the two states after the Second World War. In addition, it will serve as a vital spark for historians seeking to carry their investigations beyond politics and into the role of sport in the social and cultural life of both states.

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