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# German-German Relations in the Fields of Sport, with Particular Reference to the Olympic Games 1952-1972

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## C O N C L U S I O N

This thesis has examined the causes and consequences of a remarkable episode in the history of the Cold War – the appearance of a joint West and East German team in the Olympic Games of 1956, 1960 and 1964. We have seen that the initiative resulted from a combination of hopes and fears in both parts of divided Germany: leaders in the GDR saw participation as a means of securing international recognition for the East German state, which remained elusive for many years, while their West German counterparts were wary of standing aside lest this leave the GDR as the sole German representative at the Olympics. At the political level, both sides were self-serving in their attitude, more so than the real architect of the whole initiative, the all-powerful IOC President Avery Brundage, who clung for a long period to the view that a joint Olympic presence would have the wider effect of bringing the two Germanys closer together. By the mid-1960s, however, all sides were coming to the view that the experiment had run its course. The Mexico Games of 1968 witnessed the beginning of the end: while earlier agreed common symbols of the team - a German flag adorned by five Olympic rings, Olympic tricots and a neutral hymn - were still in place, there were now separate German columns entering the stadium at the opening ceremony. And the final end to Brundage's dream of sporting unity, let alone the wish that this could also engender a more general German-German closeness, came in 1972 at the Munich Olympics. Two – hostile – German teams entered the stadium, each with their own flag, own dress and own anthem. After the tragedy that overtook the Munich Games in the form of the attack on Israeli athletes, Brundage's successor as IOC President, Lord Killanin, had no intention of reviving any prospect of

renewed German-German Olympic cooperation, and indeed was rather disparaging about the whole experiment.

While Brundage at least deserves credit for his persistence, and his skill in manipulating the IOC and the international community in backing his approach, in reality he was swimming against the tide of history. The story of German-German Olympic cooperation was not a happy one, either at the rhetorical level of political leaders supporting the initiative or in the practice of West and East athletes coming together in three successive Olympic years. A review of the internal *modus operandi* of the joint team reinforces the latter point. Following the IOC decision of June 1955, both Germanys were instructed to form a joint team for the 1956 Olympic Games. Representatives of both NOCs discussed practicalities at a meeting held at Hinterzarten in West Germany in August 1955. Contemporary witness and sportswriter Lehmann commented:

The GDR prevailed in its demand to be in sole responsibility for its sportspeople in the joint team. By this measure the basis for a truly joint team was already undermined.<sup>1</sup>

This was a much less than satisfactory beginning for a joint venture. Yet worse was soon to come, and West German sports journalist Mengden reflected on the first actual appearance of the joint team at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics:

There was no all-German team at all. The ‘two teams’ arrived and departed separately and the relationship between officials of the two NOCs at the Games was more than strained. There was no question of a ‘team’ in the sense of sporting cohesion and human camaraderie. But IOC President Avery Brundage believed in the illusion of having achieved something politics had not: German re-unification. It was a nice depiction, yet a mirage.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lehmann, Norbert, *Internationale Sportbeziehungen und Sportpolitik der DDR, Teil I* (International Sports Relations and Sportspolitics of the GDR, Part 1) Münster/Germany: Lit Verlag (1986), p. 307.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Lehmann, *GDR Sportspolitics*, p. 309.

Commenting on the Innsbruck Winter Games of 1964 Thomas Köhler, one of the leaders of the GDR contingent of the joint team, took a more balanced view than many of his ideologically driven politically leaders:

Despite the fact that we were a common team we rather considered ourselves as sporting competitors. At a press conference I was asked to comment on our relationship with the West German contingent to which I replied 'It was as good as could be. We were helping them when this was possible, they were helping us. We got along well together'.<sup>3</sup>

A more telling comment was made, however, by Heinz Schöbel as head of the GDR section of the joint German team at Innsbruck. He was quoted as saying:

We pretend to maintain appearances but all of us know that there's no longer anything behind this. Indeed a German-German team is present, but in reality it's all pure fiction. We are playing a charade to the world.<sup>4</sup>

With reference to the Grenoble Winter Games of 1968, by which time relations between the two sections of the team had further deteriorated, even Köhler sharply criticised his West German colleagues by noting:

International sporting friendship was not as solid as we had expected. Some got together against us. Foremost so the head of the West German contingent who demanded (...) that not only the women, but the entire East German section of the in principle still existing joint team should be banned from the Games.<sup>5</sup>

What happened in reality was that three leading female contenders of the GDR section in the singles competition heated the skids of their luges, a replay of the scandal at the Innsbruck Games. This resulted in their disqualification on the strength of the decision of a Polish referee (who naively then uttered 'I'm sorry that the women are members of a

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<sup>3</sup> Köhler, *Two Sides*, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> *Der Spiegel*, 5 February 1964, issue 6/1964, p. 65.

<sup>5</sup> Köhler, *Two Sides*, p. 68.

federation close to me'), to the benefit of the West German competitors. Manfred Ewald, head of the GDR team, came up with a bizarre explanation for the incident, stating that 'the scandalous happenings were the result of a West German provocation prepared long in advance'.<sup>6</sup>

The balance of the evidence thus supports the notion that has been evident throughout this thesis: that despite small-scale examples of cross-border sporting cooperation, notably in and around Berlin, throughout the time-span of Olympic cooperation, relations within the two sections of the joint team – be it by instruction of sports managements in the two Germanys, or *sui generis* – were never indicative of any kind of 'communality'. Rather, they were more indicative of detachment, if not, animosity. Although the athletes shared a common history, language and a similar cultural background, they operated within totally different sports performance systems. Above all, in contrast to liberal conditions in the FRG, GDR competitors were the subject of the systems and norms of an autocratic state, which by itself rendered German-German togetherness next to an impossibility.

Although not revealed until much later, the gulf separating the two sides of the joint team was starkly illustrated by differing attitudes towards drug-taking, which was beginning to emerge by the 1970s as a major problem confronting international sport as the amateur era gave way to professionalism and commercialism. In 2012 two German sports

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<sup>6</sup> *Der Spiegel*, 2 September 1968, issue 8/1968, p. 97.

historians chaired a round-table symposium on the issue of doping.<sup>7</sup> They reported that already prior to the 1972 Olympics, there were considerable suspicions about use of anabolic steroids in the GDR, and ahead of Munich the West German *Sportbund* had in fact issued instructions on controls of performance-enhancing supplements by competitors. International efforts to fight doping perpetrations were supported by world sports federations and the IOC, but there was little vigorous testing and much lack of communication on the subject. By the time of the 1972 Olympics, anabolica were not yet proscribed; they were included in the IOC 'list of prohibitions' only in 1974. In a half-hearted and poorly organised fashion 2,078 probes of body fluids were taken in 1972 at Munich, resulting in just seven disqualifications.<sup>8</sup>

Later research confirmed that in the period of the run-up to Munich Games, increasingly questionable substances were systematically dispensed to top GDR athletes. The one most used was trade-marked *Oral-Turinabol Anabolikum*, produced by the GDR's *VEB Jenapharm* pharmaceutical concern. Most of the recipients were unaware – and were kept uninformed – of the negative side effects. Female athletes especially suffered from these side effects, including hirsutism, the abnormal growth of bodily hair. The suspicion arises that the surprising numbers of gold medals won by the GDR at Munich was in no small measure the result of systematic and illegal drug abuse. A leading German sports journalist was to observe:

The doping system of the GDR was the most complex one in history. It included each and every one of their top athletes. Misuse of medication for enhancement

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<sup>7</sup> Braun, Jutta & Wiese, Rene, of Potsdam University and the Berlin-based ZdS, *Zentrum deutsche Sportgeschichte* (Centre for German History of Sports), convened at GHIL, the German Historical Institute London, 10 July 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Lämmer, *Olympic Movement*, p. 284.

of sporting performances will be found almost anywhere in the world. However by employing its government resources and fully applying the restrictive system of its *Stasi* organisation, the GDR has developed this pernicious trickery to perfection.<sup>9</sup>

Buoyed up by success at Munich, GDR officials increased their efforts to use and conceal banned substances. At the following Olympic Games of 1976 in Montreal, the GDR team gained 90 medals, compared with only 39 of the team of the FRG. After the eventual reunification of Germany, legal proceedings were started against many of the top sports functionaries and medical staff of the former East Germany, a process that continues until the present day. One of the accused was Thomas Köhler, vice-chairman of the Athletics and Gymnastics Federation, who faced hefty fines as well as ongoing accusations involving doping in children as young as eleven. In addition to public prosecution cases, many private claims for compensation were anticipated.<sup>10</sup>

However, in a long term perspective it must be conceded that the FDR was not entirely innocent in this matter, as a 2011 newspaper article stresses:

The doping-system West is still different from the reckless, state-planned project of doping as practiced in the GDR. But only in its size; its basis was the same. Doping West as much as East was financed by citizens who were led to believe in a pure world. Use of public funds, so it appears, was hardly under control. The *Wessi* [much-used acronym for a citizen of the FRG] was no better, and many hints over the last 40 years are pointing in this direction. Sports physicians, functionaries, trainers and athletes used any means to promote their progress.<sup>11</sup>

Despite more stringent testing regimes, experts claim that up to one third of elite German sportsmen and women continue to ingest illegal substances today.<sup>12</sup> While any notion of

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<sup>9</sup> Fischer-Solms, Herbert, 'Doping in East and West', in: *Wir Gegen Uns* (We against Ourselves) ed. by Martin, Anne (Leipzig/Germany: 2009) p. 112.

<sup>10</sup> *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 27 September 2010, issue no. 218, p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> Hecker, Anno, in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 27 September 2010, issue no. 225, p. 28.

FDR athletes as ‘Knights in Shining Armour’, compared with the nefarious practices taking place in the other Germany, is no longer tenable, it remains the case that the extensive introduction of doping by the GDR was probably a decisive factor in the sporting performance of the East German component of the joint German teams. There are no records of doping controls in any of the German-German Olympic teams, but it is difficult to believe that the sharply increased success of the GDR component of the team in Mexico was not connected with the government-organized and *Stasi*-controlled practice of doping in their home country. The importance of performance-enhancement was further underlined by the astonishing success of autonomous East German team in the Munich Olympics of 1972.

As an unhappy marriage of convenience rather than a signal of underlying if hidden harmony, the experience of the joint German teams left some deep scars, both individual and collective, that persist to the present day. Thomas Köhler has appeared several times in this thesis, his 2010 autobiography being a rare example of direct reflections by someone inside the GDR sports movement. Yet there is a major flaw in his book. Everybody, in East Germany as well as outside, was aware that no one could achieve any position of influence in the country without membership in the *SED*, the all-powerful state party. Köhler was economical with the truth by never mentioning his prominent party membership, though it seems he was a member from 1958 onwards and was even awarded the *VVO*, *Vaterländischer Verdienstorden* (Fatherland’s Order of Merit), the highest decoration awarded by the *SED* government.<sup>13</sup> Although he referred in his book,

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<sup>12</sup> *DIE ZEIT*, 6 December 2012, issue no. 50, p. 51.

<sup>13</sup> Müller-Enbergs, *Who was Who in the GDR*, p. 213.

rather coyly, to ‘my closeness to the State during the times of the GDR’,<sup>14</sup> Köhler played down the extent to which his privileged world collapsed as a result of the implosion of the GDR in 1989. Hard times awaited him. Unlike some of his less high ranking former GDR colleagues, nobody in West German sports wanted to have anything to do with Köhler, an attitude certainly not unconnected to the constant defamation of FDR sports officials by the *DTSB*. When in the 1990s Köhler travelled to some sites of his former sporting successes – such as Lillehammer/ Norway and Lake Placid/USA – hoping to find employment, he was refused work and residency permits. Eventually for ten years prior to his retirement in 2005, he found a job in Berlin; not in anything sport-related but as a foods company marketing manager.

As far as twentieth-first century Germans more generally are concerned, the tone of regret looking back was perhaps best seen in a 2009 exhibition, organised in Leipzig, entitled ‘Wir gegen uns, Sport im geteilten Deutschland’ (‘We against Ourselves, Sports in divided Germany’). An article in a leading Germany weekly magazine later commented:

The exhibition...tells a history of sport as a competition between systems. Most importantly: the exhibition is fair. It does not present a scenario of Western victories. For which there would be no reason anyway. Both German states were striving for international prestige by top sport successes – the GDR with identity seeking obstinacy.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the fact that the exhibition was concerned with events and related propaganda from several decades earlier, it found wide public interest. After showing in Leipzig, it

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<sup>14</sup> Köhler, *Two Sides*, p. 213.

<sup>15</sup> *DIE ZEIT*, Hamburg, 4 February 2010, no . 64, p. 18.

was moved for a period to the ‘House of History’ in Bonn, the de facto former capital of the FRG.

The 2009 exhibition, which tackled various aspects of German post-war sport including the Olympics, was accompanied by a book containing a myriad of photos, paintings, pictures and edited extracts interviews with sportsmen and women.<sup>16</sup> In the introduction to the book, Hans Walter Hütter noted that the exhibition, while seeking to be balanced, could not avoid highlighting the extent to which – for most of the 1945-89 period - sport had unfortunately been used as a direct instrument of politics.<sup>17</sup> Hütter notes that it took many years after the collapse of the Iron Curtain to rebuild trust between those living in different parts of Germany and for the nation to re-establish itself as a single, coherent force in the international sporting community. As far as the joint Olympic teams of the 1950s and 1960s were concerned, the consensus appeared to be that these were a charade. Despite the strivings of Brundage, the endless discussions over flags and hymns and the efforts of athletes at the Games to put a brave face on things, the manner in which Germans – whether living in the former West or East – looked back on the Olympic experiment could not be better than summed up in the title of the Leipzig/Bonn exhibition: ‘We against Ourselves’.

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<sup>16</sup> Hütter, Dr. Hans Walter et al eds., *Wir gegen uns, Sport im geteilten Deutschland [We against Ourselves, Sports in divided Germany]* (Bonn: Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland [Foundation House of History of the German Federal Republic], Primus-Verlag, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Hütter, *We against Ourselves*, p. 6.