



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15688/jvolsu4.2026.2.15>

UDC 327.54(100)

LBC 66.4(0)'6

Submitted: 02.06.2025

Accepted: 09.02.2026

SPORTS DISCOURSE IN (DE)CONSTRUCTING THE COLD WAR IMAGE OF THE ENEMY: COMPARING SOVIET AND AMERICAN MAGAZINES' REPRESENTATIONS OF OLYMPIC GAMES

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Abstract. *Introduction.* Using the example of representations of the Olympic Games, the article analyses the creation and deconstruction of the image of the enemy through Soviet and American sports discourse as a component of the Cold War. The relevance of the study lies in the need to explore both the technologies used to construct and deconstruct the image of the enemy in international politics and the historical dimension of Russia – USA relations. *Method and materials.* The materials consist of publications in the leading sports magazines of the USSR (Physical Culture and Sport) and the USA (Sports Illustrated) from 1948 to 1991 (approximately 200 issues in total). *Results.* Sports discourse was actively employed in the USSR and the USA, emphasising the values that each superpower claimed to defend. The qualities attributed to “us” and “them” reflected broader characteristics associated with the Soviet and American ways of life. Representations of the Games, which were presented primarily as a rivalry between the USSR and the USA, reflect these features of sports discourse. However, the Olympic ideals served as a constraint on the production of hostility. The American magazine exhibited greater variability in its portrayal of sporting rivalry between the USSR and the USA, whereas the Soviet magazine contrasted “overseas sports businessmen” with US athletes. Sports discourse thus functioned as a resource for constructing the Cold War images of the enemy. At the same time, it also contained the potential for deconstructing these images: sporting competitions were interpreted as a demonstration of the possibility of peaceful rivalry and cooperation between the USSR and the USA across various spheres. *Funding.* The study was funded by RSF, Grant No. 22-18-00305-P, “The images of the enemy in Cold War popular culture: their content, contemporary reception and usage in Russian and U.S. symbolic politics”.

Key words: Cold War, image of the enemy, sports discourse, Olympic Games, Physical Culture and Sport magazine, Sports Illustrated magazine.

Citation. Riabov O.V. Sports Discourse in (De)Constructing the Cold War Image of the Enemy: Comparing Soviet and American Magazines' Representations of Olympic Games. *Vestnik Volgogradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Seriya 4. Istoriya. Regionovedenie. Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya* [Science Journal of Volgograd State University. History. Area Studies. International Relations], 2026, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 178-189. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15688/jvolsu4.2026.2.15>

УДК 327.54(100)

ББК 66.4(0)'6

Дата поступления статьи: 02.06.2025

Дата принятия статьи: 09.02.2026

СПОРТИВНЫЙ ДИСКУРС В КОНСТРУИРОВАНИИ И ДЕКОНСТРУКЦИИ ОБРАЗОВ ВРАГА ПЕРИОДА ХОЛОДНОЙ ВОЙНЫ: СРАВНИВАЯ РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИИ ОЛИМПИЙСКИХ ИГР В ЖУРНАЛАХ СССР И США

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Аннотация. *Введение.* На примере репрезентаций Олимпийских игр анализируются создание и деконструкция образов врага при помощи советского и американского спортивного дискурса как составляющей холодной войны. Актуальность определяется потребностью изучения как технологий создания и деконструкции образа врага в международной политике, так и исторического измерения российско-американских отношений. *Материалы и методы.* Материалами являются публикации в ведущих спортивных журналах СССР («Физкультура и спорт») и США («Спортс Иллюстрайтед») за 1948–1991 гг. (в сумме около 200 выпусков). *Результаты.* Спортивный дискурс активно использовался в СССР и в США. В нем подчеркивались те ценности, которые защищала каждая из двух сверхдержав. Черты, приписываемые «своему» и «чужому» спорту, коррелировали с характеристиками советского и американского образа жизни в целом. В репрезентациях Олимпиад, которые были представлены как соперничество прежде всего СССР и США, эти черты спортивного дискурса находят отражение, однако олимпийские идеалы выступали фактором, ограничивающим продуцирование враждебности. Для американского журнала характерна большая вариативность взглядов на спортивное соперничество СССР и США, для советского – противопоставление «заокеанских дельцов от спорта» и американских спортсменов. Спортивный дискурс служил одним из ресурсов создания образов врага; вместе с тем он содержал потенциал и для деконструкции этих образов: спортивные соревнования интерпретировались как свидетельство возможности сотрудничества СССР и США во многих областях. *Финансирование.* Исследование выполнено за счет гранта Российского научного фонда № 22-18-00305-П «Образы врага в массовой культуре Холодной войны: содержание, современная рецепция и использование в символической политике России и США».

Ключевые слова: холодная война, образ врага, спортивный дискурс, Олимпийские игры, журнал «Физкультура и спорт», журнал «Спортс Иллюстрайтед».

Цитирование. Рябов О. В. Спортивный дискурс в конструировании и деконструкции образов врага периода холодной войны: сравнивая репрезентации Олимпийских игр в журналах СССР и США // Вестник Волгоградского государственного университета. Серия 4, История. Регионоведение. Международные отношения. – 2026. – Т. 31, № 2. – С. 178–189. – (На англ. яз.). – DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15688/jvolsu4.2026.2.15>

Introduction. Various aspects of the role of sport in the Cold War have long been of interest to Russian and foreign researchers. Noting that sport was part of the “cultural Cold War” [4], scholars turn to such issues as its role in the “struggle for hearts and minds”; the influence of political events on the development of the international sports movement; sports diplomacy; and the representation of sporting rivalry between the two superpowers in the popular culture of that period [3; 6; 9; 10; 13; 14; 15; 18 and others]. The paper addresses a subject that has not yet been examined – the role of sports discourse in the construction, maintenance, and transformation of enemy images. While various resources contributing to the production of such an important component of the “cultural Cold War” as the enemy image – including political, historical, confessional, anthropological, and other discourses – are being actively examined [12], the role of sports discourse remains largely unexplored. The article thus pursues two aims: to examine the construction and deconstruction of the enemy image through representations of sports, and to conduct a comparative analysis of the role of sports discourse in the USSR and the USA as part of the “cultural Cold War”.

This article focuses on representations of the Olympic Games, as this phenomenon has always been not only athletic but also political, and above all, closely tied to the confrontation between the two superpowers. A total of 22 Olympic Games were held during the Cold War, with the Olympic teams of the USSR and the USA competing against each other in 17 of them. Additionally, two significant events in the “cultural Cold War” were the boycotts of the 1980 Moscow Games by the USA and its allies and the 1984 Los Angeles Games by the USSR and its allies.

The materials consist of publications from two sports magazines representing the USSR and the USA. The Soviet source is the monthly magazine *Physical Culture and Sport (Fizkultura i Sport, hereinafter FiS)*, published by the USSR State Sports Committee since 1928. As the country’s main sports publication, it played a key role in shaping official interpretations of events in the world of sports. The American source is the weekly magazine *Sports Illustrated (hereinafter SI)*, the most influential sports magazine in the USA, founded in 1954 by Henry Luce and published by Time Inc. Although sports journalism in the USA exhibited greater diversity

of opinion than in the USSR, and alternative perspectives were available, the selected magazines are broadly representative and appropriate for a comparative analysis of Soviet and American sports media. In total, around 200 issues from the period 1948–1991 have been examined.

First, we focus on methodological issues related to the imagological potential of sports discourse – its capacity to construct enemy images. Then, we examine how the Cold War sports discourse was formed in the 1940s–1950s, along with the views expressed in the two magazines regarding the role of the USSR and the USA in the Olympic movement. Next, as a case study, we analyse the coverage of the 1960 Winter and Summer Games, which were held six months apart in different international contexts. Finally, we trace the tendencies of the development of Cold War Olympic discourse in the 1960s–1980s.

The imagological potential of sports discourse. High-performance sport shares both common and distinctive features with other forms of mass culture. These features define its imagological potential, that is, its capacity to be employed in the production, dissemination, and consumption of images of “us” and “them”. First is its democratic and mass nature; even basic literacy is not required to consume sports entertainment. Moreover, sport generates, albeit temporary, the breaking of social barriers [2]. Secondly, sport is marked by the collective consumption of images of sports competitions. The energy generated by collective participation significantly amplifies emotional impact and, consequently, the propaganda effect. Thirdly, sport is associated with the military sphere. As George Orwell noticed, sport is war minus the shooting [1]. Sport serves as a substitute for war, since it is a form of fierce rivalry in which, as a rule, the victory of one side means the defeat of the other. Importantly, the confrontation occurs in real time (unlike cinema or satirical graphics), and the unpredictability of the outcome not only heightens audience interest, but also fosters a sense that it depends on their efforts. All of these factors contribute to the heightened aggressiveness of the sports entertainment industry, which is reflected, for example, in the significant presence of supporters of ultra-right ideologies among fan groups.

The most extreme form of ‘them’ is the enemy, and sports discourse can serve as a resource for fulfilling all the functions of the enemy image, including the reinforcement of collective identity, political mobilisation, the legitimisation of violence, the legitimisation of power, and the prediction of victory [12].

The function of strengthening collective identity is realised through the construction of the enemy as radically different from “us” and by drawing a symbolic boundary with “them”. Sports competitions are linked to appeals to collective identity, with a sharp division between “us” and “them”. At the same time, it is not only athletes who are involved in the competition but also those who identify themselves with them – sports fans. National categories of “us” and “them” evoke particularly strong emotions. Sport serves as a resource for the formation of national identity; victories in major sporting competitions generate national pride. That is why events in the sporting arena – especially in the era of sports’ televised broadcasts – attract the attention of a vast audience.

The function of political mobilisation involves generating a sense of the threat posed by the enemy to the most important values and interests of the community. Athletic performance alone does not provoke fear; however, in a particular context, it can be used to demonstrate the strength of an opponent (as will be discussed later).

The function of the legitimisation of violence requires representing the enemy in a manner that justifies negative attitudes towards them or even their destruction. The principal technique employed is the dehumanisation of the enemy, which takes two forms: animalistic and mechanistic [5]. Examples of using sports discourse to dehumanise the enemy include the comparison of the Soviet hockey team to a machine in the USA [11] or the attribution of bestial morals to American sports in the USSR.

The function of the legitimisation of power is linked to discussions about which political force is capable of eliminating the threat posed by the enemy to a community. This helps to explain the desire of the authorities to associate themselves with the victories of athletes in the sporting arena.

The realisation of the function of predicting victory is linked to portraying the enemy as weak, ridiculous, and destined for defeat – including on the sports field. This contributes to heightened

intensity in competitions involving athletes from countries with adversarial relations.

At the same time, it should be kept in mind that sport has become one of the factors of political dialogue, offering a model of relations that illustrates the benefits of peaceful cooperation. Sport functions as a means of intensifying international collaboration, serving as a tool for conflict resolution and the establishment of intercultural dialogue. Sport is used by states as an element of 'soft power', showcasing the capacity of their society to develop human potential.

All of this influenced the role of sports in the "cultural Cold War".

Forming Soviet Cold War discourse on the Olympics in 1940s – 1950s. The modern Olympic Games were revived in 1896 on the initiative of Baron Pierre de Coubertin. By the time the Soviet national team began participating in the Olympics, 12 Summer and 6 Winter Games had already been held. In the USSR, during the 1920s and 1930s, the prevailing opposition between "proletarian physical culture" and "bourgeois sport" led to a lack of interest in the Olympic movement¹. However, the post-war confrontation with the USA set new objectives for Soviet sport. A turning point was marked by the resolution of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b), dated 27 December 1948, which identified the attainment of "world supremacy in major sports in the immediate future" as a priority [9].

This entry of Soviet sport into the international arena required ideological justification, and *FiS* magazine made a significant contribution to this process. The magazine emphasised that the sporting successes of the USSR demonstrated the superiority of the socialist system over its capitalist counterpart². The ideologisation of sport was further supported by assigning it the role of a necessary condition for communist construction, in line with Soviet political anthropology; on the pages of *FiS*, the idea that the canon of the new Soviet person should include physical perfection was substantiated³. The magazine highlighted within the Soviet sporting ethos such values as the dedication of athletes to communism, love for the Motherland, collectivism, comradeship, and gender equality. High-performance sport was constructed as an arena of confrontation between two worlds, the differences between which were represented as the opposites.

The *FiS* representations of US sport were characterised by features that aligned with broader depictions of America: the prioritisation of big business interests; social inequality in access to sport; racial discrimination; the exploitation of professional athletes by businessmen; the development of athletes' physical abilities at the expense of intellectual and moral qualities; individualism and the perception of the other only as a rival; dishonesty and the pursuit of victory at any cost; the cult of bestial cruelty and violence; and the militarisation of sport and its use in promoting American exceptionalism globally. At the same time, it is important to take into account the notion of "two Americas", a concept central to the Soviet worldview. Alongside portrayals of "reactionary" Americans, Soviet audiences were also presented with images of "progressive" Americans: communists, members of the working class, champions of peace, "people of goodwill", African Americans, and "ordinary people" [12]. This concept was also reflected in sports discourse; the struggle for peace of the "progressive figures of American sport" was a recurring theme of *FiS* publications⁴.

The representations of those Cold War-era Games in which Soviet athletes had not yet participated (the Winter and Summer Games of 1948 and the Winter Games of 1952) in *FiS* generally aligned with the noted trends in constructing the image of "enemy number one". For example, in reports on the 1948 Games in London – described as the "Olympics of athletes from bourgeois countries"⁵, – US athletes were accused of racism, a cult of violence, and dishonesty⁶. The magazine described the behaviour of the US hockey players at the 1952 Winter Games in Oslo as "shameless and hooligan-like"⁷.

The first Olympic appearances of Soviet athletes were presented in *FiS* as an epoch-making event. In its report on the Helsinki Summer Games, the magazine noted: "Although peace and friendship are the idea of the Olympics, until 1952 they were diluted in every possible way by the organisers of the Games, whose goals were very far from this noble idea." Thanks to the participation of the USSR national team, a new page had been opened in the history of the Games. After the end of the competition, the athletes travelled all over the globe, carrying in their hearts the belief that all nations could live peacefully, amicably and happily.

The Olympics were presented above all as a Soviet-American sporting rivalry. *FiS* emphasised the superiority of the Soviet Olympians over the Americans, which was eventually called into question only through dishonest methods – the machinations of “henchmen of overseas businessmen in the judging panels”. The enemy of the Olympic movement in the coverage of the Helsinki Olympics was the “warmongers”. They also created the myth of the Iron Curtain; meanwhile, “athletes from all countries, meeting with the envoys of the USSR, were convinced that they did not want war, that they were simple, cheerful, friendly, and peace-loving people”. That is, the most important aspects of conceptualising the Olympics as an effective means of promoting peace emerged, which during the Cold War became a hallmark of the USSR’s foreign policy and a cornerstone of Soviet identity [12]. Finally, representations of the Games contributed to the creation of the canon of the Soviet athlete – honest, peace-loving, and respectful of rivals – as a specific embodiment of the canon of the “New Soviet man”⁸.

Thus, the coverage of these Games in *FiS* outlined a range of themes that would remain central to subsequent representations of the Olympics: the role of the USSR and the USA in the Olympic movement; the motivations behind Soviet athletes’ participation in it; the ideal of the Soviet sportsman; the image of American athletes; the nature of sport in the USA; Soviet-American sporting rivalry; relations between Soviet and American athletes; and the conspiracies of the enemies of the Olympic movement.

With the expansion of cultural ties between the USSR and the USA in the mid-1950s, representations of the Olympics began to shift. The *FiS* report on the 1956 Winter Games reflected the warming of bilateral relations. In addition to highlighting the Games’ contribution to the struggle for peace and the “atmosphere of friendship, camaraderie, and fair competition” that prevailed at the Olympics, the magazine also noted, for example, “The US athletes visited the Soviet athletes”⁹. Even more optimistic were the reports from the Melbourne Games (1956), particularly emphasising that the “spirit of friendship” was visible to everyone “on the day of the opening ceremony of the Olympics, when American and Soviet athletes warmly applauded each other during the parade”¹⁰.

Forming US Cold War discourse on the Olympics in 1940s – 1950s. The image of the USSR in US sports discourse depended not only on the state of relations between the two countries, but also on the specific features of American sport. First of all, in the USA, high-performance sport was above all big business; representations of “us” and “them” were shaped in ways intended to engage audiences and generate income for business interests. Secondly, sport in the USA was highly decentralised. Thirdly, the most popular sports in the USA were those that were poorly developed outside the country. From the mid-1950s, US sport began to become more international, gradually overcoming its isolationism. However, this does not mean that sports discourse had not previously been deployed in the context of the Cold War. The sporting achievements of US athletes on the international stage were welcomed. Additionally, attitudes towards sports were used to label “Reds” within US society: during the McCarthy era, several films associated dislike for sport with pro-Communist views [12]. Sport also affirmed the values of the ‘Free World’ in whose name the Cold War was fought: freedom, individual responsibility, personal success, and patriotism [18]. The issue of racial discrimination was of particular importance in ideological battles. Consequently, propaganda that highlighted the sporting achievements of the US coloured population was used to demonstrate the positive dynamics in eliminating racism. Finally, the USA used sport in Third World countries in the context of cultural diplomacy [8; 15].

The sporting success of the USSR – particularly at its first Olympic appearance in 1952, when Soviet athletes competed with their US counterparts – generated both alarm and interest and forced them to pay attention to sporting developments behind the Iron Curtain. The president of the International Olympic Committee, US citizen Avery Brundage, visited the USSR in 1954 and was reportedly very impressed by what he saw¹¹. The most notable was a report published in *SI* in 1957, in which a US journalist, sharing his impressions of his travelling to the USSR, noted that sports were a common thing there, and that was reflected in impressive results. This was a consequence of government directives, active propaganda of sports, the absence of fees for using sports

infrastructure, and the availability of free time as a result of the establishment of an 8-hour workday in the USSR. The article was quite critical of the Soviet way of life, but sports helped change the author's negative opinion of "them": "I found many things in the Soviet Union which seemed strange and funny and also bad. But the people are great. They are quite a different people from the concept we have had of them for 40 years"¹².

The development of mass sports in the USSR also received different assessments. Of particular interest is the article "Soft American," published in *SI* in December 1960, authored by the president-elect John F. Kennedy. The politician emphasized the importance of mass sports for the country's security, noted the decline in the physical fitness of U.S. youth, and accompanied the securitization of American physical training with the image of a formidable enemy: "Our increasing lack of physical fitness, is a menace to our security <...> We face in the Soviet Union a powerful and implacable adversary <...> To meet the challenge of this enemy will require determination and will and effort on the part of all Americans." However, Kennedy did not at all call for becoming like the "enemy number one"; he emphasized the advantages of the American way of life over the Soviet one: the USA was a free country, and its citizens were not "forced to live their lives in the interest of the state": "We are, all of us, as free to direct the activities of our bodies as we are to pursue the objects of our thought"¹³.

The USA took a long time to come to terms with the effectiveness of high-performance sports in the "struggle for hearts and minds." It was only in 1956 that an article appeared in the *Foreign Affairs* magazine in which the author, as if a revelation, presented his point of view on the role of sports in Soviet propaganda: Soviet leaders believe that sports should serve state interests in the sphere of politics¹⁴. In addition to turning sport into a propaganda tool at home and abroad, the U.S. media accused Soviet sport of suppressing the individuality of athletes (which was reflected in the priority given to team sports in the USSR); repression against athletes and coaches; militarization; and widespread use of means that violated sports ethics, justified by the broader goals of Soviet-American confrontation.

The *SI* devoted considerable attention to the Olympic movement, whose values were presented

as those of the "Free World"; in contrast, the Soviet system was depicted as inherently hostile to Olympism. A key theme in the US image of the USSR was despotism: the totalitarian regime was seen as infiltrating every aspect of life, including sport. These views were reflected in *SI*'s discussion of three interrelated issues in Soviet-American Olympic rivalry: the amateur status of athletes from the USSR (which is a prerequisite for participation in the Games); the scoring system that prioritized the results of national teams over individual performances; and the close connection between sporting success and national prestige.

The transformation of sport into the main profession of Soviet athletes – some of whom were labelled *shamateurs* [16] – drew sharp criticism in the USA. It was seen as undermining the ideals of Olympism, with the USSR's desire to frame the Games as a contest between political systems presented as the main reason. *SI* repeatedly addressed this issue, attempting to determine the extent to which the USSR's approach posed a threat to Olympism¹⁵. The author of the article "Are we losing the Olympic ideal?" noted with regret that the "great international festival is becoming cannon fodder in the Cold War, with major stress on national pride, winning, scoring points, and beating Russia at all costs"; "sportswriters at the most recent Olympics in 1952 at Helsinki played up the Cold War in sports and used point scores as bait to attract readers." Meanwhile, interpreting the Games as a rivalry between nations, or even political systems, meant allowing the USSR to impose its approach to sport on the entire world. He called, "Let's not let Russia push us into doing likewise"¹⁶.

At the same time, the magazine also contained many comments more traditional to the Cold War rhetoric. Thus, before the Games in Melbourne, the *SI* cited the demand of a senator from Maryland related to Soviet state-subsidized sportsmen's participation in the Games: "We should do everything humanly possible to ban Russia and her barbaric goon squads from the 1956 Summer Games <...> These unprincipled disciples of the devil walked all over our youth at the Winter Olympics"¹⁷.

Squaw Valley vs Rome: The 1960 Games in the context of the Cold War. In this part of the article, we will analyze the representations of the two Olympic Games held in 1960: in February

in Squaw Valley, California, and in August in the Eternal City. The case is of particular interest because it enables a comparison not only of Soviet and American portrayals of “them” in the Olympic context but also of the representations of two sporting events held in different international settings.

The Winter Olympics were held in an atmosphere of hope for significant improvement in bilateral relations, following the visit of Nikita Khrushchev to the USA in September 1959 and the expected reciprocal visit of Dwight Eisenhower. However, following the 1960 U-2 incident in May, relations between the USSR and the USA deteriorated significantly, and the Rome Olympics took place under markedly different political circumstances.

In *FiS*, the account of the White Olympics was presented in a piece by the chief editor, bearing the telling title “Times Are Changing.” Representations of the USA in Soviet sports discourse were indeed undergoing change.

Firstly, the USA was portrayed in an exceptionally benevolent manner; there was no mention of either the vices of sport or the social scourges. In the following issue of *FiS*, in an article marking the anniversary of victory in World War II, a reminder is included: “In their struggle, the Soviet people were not alone. The sailors from San Francisco fought alongside them for the freedom of mankind.” The piece also contained an appeal: “We must not allow people who have forgotten the lessons of war to unleash a bloodbath again.” The magazine further recalls a recent example of cooperation related to the seven-week drift of Soviet sailors on a barge in the Pacific Ocean and their rescue by the Americans.

Secondly, the achievements of US sports were emphasized, as was the contribution of the USA to the development of international sport or the organization of sport within the United States.

Thirdly, Americans themselves were depicted with considerable sympathy. It is particularly noteworthy that these positive portrayals were no longer limited to “progressive” Americans; among the positively depicted figures were representatives of those social groups that had previously personified “reactionary” America: big businessmen, “corrupt journalists,” and pop culture magnates. The class-based approach is almost entirely absent. The image of former arch-

enemies of Soviet journalists – members of the American bourgeois press – was also undergoing transformation. “The staff of *FiS* visited their colleagues from *SI*, who, in introducing the Soviet journalists, said, ‘These are our Russian brothers, from the magazine *Physical Culture and Sport*.’” Probably, against the background of such representations of the USA, *FiS* readers could hardly disagree with the magazine’s conclusion that “the ice of the Cold War is crumbling more and more”¹⁸.

Fourthly, the image of American athletes was also undergoing change. This is how, for example, the US hockey players, who became champions for the first time, were portrayed: while noting that their victory was deserved, *FiS* journalists highlighted qualities such as “perseverance,” “the ability to fight selflessly until the last second,” and “remarkable courage”¹⁹.

Changes were also evident in the visual portrayal of athletes. *FiS* published a large photograph showing the celebrated speed skater Yevgeny Grishin in a conversation with a US female athlete. “A Russian matryoshka doll! This is a souvenir!” she exclaimed with delight. America was no longer depicted as a capitalist, warmonger, or wolf but instead appeared as a smiling young woman...²⁰

The “honeymoon” in Soviet-American relations, however, was soon coming to an end, and from the second half of 1960 onwards, the tone of sports representations of the USA in Soviet sports discourse began to change. Many features of the representations of the USA that had been established in Soviet sports discourse during the first decade of the Cold War were once again in demand.

The Summer Olympics in Rome took place against this political backdrop. It is hardly accidental that, when announcing the opening of the Games, *FiS* reminded readers it coincided with the 15th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima²¹. The results of the sporting competitions were used to draw conclusions about the rivalry between socio-political systems²². Of note, too, is the use of such characteristics to describe US athletes as “self-confidence,” “boastfulness,” and “self-promotion”²³. Finally, it is significant that military vocabulary was used to describe the competitions – for example, the victory of the USSR national athletics team was designated as the “Waterloo of America”²⁴.

“The Russians are Coming” was the title of an article about the Squaw Valley competition, published in the pre-Olympic issue of *SI* ²⁵. It described Soviet athletes as leaders of world sport – without any negative comments. The magazine presented highly positive portrayals of individual Soviet athletes ²⁶.

The issue of *SI* dedicated to the results of the Olympics emphasised that “the one indisputable, over-all winner at Squaw Valley was no individual or nation at all, but the world itself, the world of sport and the world of people”. The organisers had feared that the political tensions of the Cold War might spoil the event, but ‘the friendliness and affection that existed between the competitors was obvious to millions of viewers’. The article “The Games Were the Best” ²⁷ was accompanied by the subtitle “These were the most successful Winter Olympics of all, and the now-friendly Russians were the most successful competitors in them.” The author attributed the Soviet victories to “a massive sports programme enveloping schools and clubs and labour unions and the military service, state encouragement, frequent outright aid to the specially talented, a fierce desire on the part of the individual to triumph, less for himself or his organisation than for Mother Russia.” He also suggested that, between the 1956 Games and the 1960 Games, the Russians had changed. “They have become more human, ceasing to be muscles without minds or personalities and became individuals. Some of them were very impressive individuals, indeed.” He went on to cite Yevgeny Grishin as an example of a bright Soviet individual. It is also noteworthy that the magazine cited Olympic champion Bob Cleary’s statement about Soviet hockey players: “They don’t talk about Communism. Like us, they talk about hockey – and girls”. In other words, the rehumanisation of the image of Soviet athletes did not entail a change in attitude towards the Soviet political system or its policies in previous years.

As for the Summer Olympics, *SI*’s reports were imbued with a different tone. The magazine’s shift in position on key issues related to Olympism is particularly noteworthy: it called for legitimising the participation of professional athletes (presumably to eliminate the advantages held by athletes from socialist countries) and for official recognition of the fact that the Olympics were

not merely a competition for individual athletes but also for nations. The article “Why Not Wave the Flag?” argued that national sentiment could not be suppressed and that nationalism – judiciously mixed with the Olympic spirit, which aims to promote sports for sports’ sake – was beneficial for sport, nations, and individuals. “So right now we don’t feel at all abashed about urging our boys in Rome to go out and beat the pants off the Russians and everyone else” ²⁸. Thus, the Games were portrayed primarily as a Soviet-American rivalry. A noticeable negativity towards Soviet athletes permeated the coverage of many aspects of the Games. For instance, in its report on the opening ceremony, *SI* ridiculed the uniform of the USSR national team: “the Russians bulked muscularly in blue single-buttoned suits that suggested something you might see at a lawn party given by Khrushchev” ²⁹. The tactics employed by the Soviet basketball team in their match against the US national team were also satirised; while the Americans shot and scored points, the Russians were described as playing basketball much like ice hockey – relying heavily on passing and team play. This was interpreted by US journalists as a reflection of the suppression of individuality and the triumph of collectivism in the USSR ³⁰. The issue of September 12 opened with an article that did not say a word about sports but emphasised that “the citizen of a free and competitive economy always enjoys more of the fruits of his labor than the citizen of a communistic or socialistic state”. Yes, the author admitted, the USSR was ahead of the USA in space; however, what was happening on Earth was much more important, and on this planet America was more successful than Russia, and its standard of living was significantly higher... ³¹

Cold War discourse on the Olympic Games in the 1960s – 1980s. Subsequently, the “cultural Cold War” also actively exploited representations of high-performance sport, which highlighted the values championed by each of the superpowers: the USSR – communism, peace, social justice, Soviet patriotism, collectivism, comradeship, and gender equality; the USA – freedom, personal achievement, hard work, equality of opportunity, Americanism, racial harmony, and national unity.

All this is evident in the representations of the Olympic movement, whose important role in

the ideological battles of the Cold War was recognised in the leading sports magazines of both the USSR and the USA. *SI* positioned Olympism as the brainchild of Western civilisation, founded on principles alien to the Soviet system. In contrast, *FiS* evolved from an initially hostile stance towards the Olympic movement to its full support, ultimately symbolically sovietising Olympism by declaring its values to be aligned with the goals of Soviet societal development. Alongside the promotion of the Soviet Motherland's prestige and the demonstration of the superiority of the socialist system, various motives for the participation of Soviet athletes in the Games were highlighted in different times. These included the struggle for peace, the unification of all progressive forces, and the demonstration of the possibility of peaceful coexistence. The coverage of the 1964 Tokyo Games added to the context of the conceptualisation of the Olympics' such value of the Soviet Thaw as humanism, the highest embodiment of which was called Communism. The socialist countries were described as the most ardent champions of the Olympic ideas, which, in turn, were portrayed as "being in blatant contradiction to the very essence of imperialism"³². "Unlocking human potential" and "demonstrating youth cooperation and unity for peace, progress, and democracy" were highlighted as the most significant results of the Games in the messages that Alexei Kosygin sent on behalf of the USSR to the IOC in 1968 and 1972³³. At the beginning of *perestroika*, those Olympic values that resonated with the ideological trends of the time were foregrounded: in his speech at the reception in honour of Soviet Olympians, Mikhail Gorbachev referred to the Olympic movement as one of the universal values of humankind³⁴.

The USSR positioned itself as the flagship of the Olympic movement and a guardian of its principles, including its depoliticisation. Thus, during the 1980 Moscow Olympics, the US authorities became the target of criticism for violating the principles of Olympism by politicising sport through their boycott. The boycott of the 1984 Games in Los Angeles by the USSR and many of its allies was explained in *FiS* not as politically motivated but as a response to the fact that the so-called "Americaniada-84" was a commercial event staged in an "atmosphere of psychosis, hate and hostility", where the safety of athletes was at risk [7].

In the United States, the representations of competitions between athletes from the USSR and the USA as part of the Cold War were largely reactive, serving as a response to Soviet symbolic politics. As noted above, it was only from the mid-1950s that sports competitions began to be perceived as part of the "struggle for hearts and minds"³⁵. In *SI*, the tendency to resist this interpretation remained quite marked, yet ultimately the view of the Games as one of the theatres of the "cultural Cold War" came to prevail. This is especially noticeable in cases of sensitive failures, such as the defeat of the US basketball team in the final of the Munich Olympics (and the aggravated fiasco of the NHL players, which occurred on the same days during the Series-72 matches with the USSR hockey team). The author of one of the articles emphasised that the situation in Olympism was developing in "a direction advantageous to the totalitarian communities". The first factor that gave the USSR an advantage over the USA was government support for sportsmen³⁶. The use of national sentiments served as another factor; it is noteworthy that the author even refers to the image of the siege of Leningrad: "as the inhabitants of the city clearly preferred death from starvation or disease... to surrender to the Nazis, the representatives of the Soviet Union in basketball, and in hockey, and in chess, will clearly do their best for their homeland." Therefore, the problem in the author's eyes was that adjustment to the ethic of Olympic victory requires a correlative adjustment of domestic values which Americans were not willing to tolerate³⁷.

It's also notable how *SI* covered the victory of the USA hockey team over the Soviet team at the Olympic Games in Lake Placid in 1980 – known as the "Miracle on Ice". The *SI* report "Do you believe in miracle?" set a frame for assessing this event as the most important one for the confrontation of the Cold War³⁸. Moreover, in December 1980, the magazine named the entire USA hockey team "Sportsmen of the Year" and described the victory itself as "the main sporting event of the 20th century". The editorial decision was explained in an article with a title that hardly needs comments – "A Reminder of What We Can Be"³⁹. The author focused less on the Olympic gold medal and more on the symbolic triumph of young US athletes over the "Great Red Bear".

The coverage of the subsequent Olympic Games in Moscow was generally unfriendly. Particular attention was paid to the boycott by Western countries and to the protests during the opening ceremony of the Games. The magazine ridiculed the measures taken by the USSR leadership to present a brilliant image of the country – although it also included the views of those who considered it unacceptable to use the Olympic movement to achieve political goals, and it acknowledged the high level of sporting competition⁴⁰.

Results. Thus, sports discourse served as one of the key instruments for constructing the Cold War image of the enemy. Its imagological potential is determined by such features as the collective nature of the consumption of sports images, the democratism and mass character of sport, and its connection with the military sphere. At the same time, sports discourse contains the potential to deconstruct the enemy image: sports competitions could be interpreted as evidence of the similarities between representatives of different social systems and of the possibility of peaceful rivalry between the USSR and the USA, as well as cooperation in various spheres. The very possibility of seeing and portraying “them” as human beings – with strengths and weaknesses – undermined the Cold War’s practices of dehumanisation.

The Olympics were represented primarily as a rivalry between the USSR and the USA. In the meantime, the importance of Olympic ideals was consistently emphasised; a sort of “Olympic truce” served to soften the level of criticism directed at the antagonistic system, which was otherwise common in the discourse outside the context of the Games.

A case study of the coverage of the 1960 Winter and Summer Games – held six months apart in entirely different international contexts – demonstrated that representations of Soviet-American sporting rivalry generally reflected the state of relations between the two countries. The most favourable portrayal of “them” appeared in the coverage of the Squaw Valley Games in 1960, where both magazines conveyed the sense that the Cold War was coming to an end. Conversely, the worsening of international tensions was accompanied by increasingly negative depictions of athletes representing “enemy number one”.

These tendencies can be seen as more or less characteristic of both Soviet and American

representations of the Olympics. As for differences, US sports discourse was marked by a greater diversity of perspectives, even within the framework of one magazine. *SI*, for example, frequently acknowledged the sporting achievements of the USSR.

In the USSR, the idea of “two Americas” required an emphasis on the distinction between “reactionary” and “progressive” Americans. Criticism was directed primarily at the “overseas sports dealers” and the sports system itself; negative commentary on US athletes was virtually absent.

NOTES

¹ The evolution of attitudes towards sports in the USSR was studied in: [3; 10; 14; 15] and others.

² Sovetskije volejbolisty – lutshije v mire. *FiS*, 1949, no. 10.

³ E.g.: Samojlov D. Znachok molodykh patriotov. *FiS*, 1950, no. 9.

⁴ E.g.: Kostin P., Tarasov N. Vospitanije ubijts. *FiS*, 1952, no. 3.

⁵ Lin A. Sovetskij mirovoj rekord. *FiS*, 1950, no. 3.

⁶ Solovov G. Sistema rastlenija. *FiS*, 1949, no. 11.

⁷ Kostin P., Tarasov N. Vospitanije ubijts.

⁸ XV olimpijskije igry. *FiS*, 1952, no. 8.

⁹ Ekzamen vyderzhan! *FiS*, 1956, no. 3.

¹⁰ Olimpiada družhby. *FiS*, 1956, no. 12.

¹¹ Thayer Ch. A Question of the Soul. *SI*, 1960, Aug. 15.

¹² Cooke J. Sports in the USSR. *SI*, 1957, Febr. 12.

¹³ Kennedy J.F. The Soft American. *SI*, 1960, Dec. 26.

¹⁴ Washburn J.N. Sport as a Soviet Tool. *Foreign Affairs*, 1956, vol. 34, no. 3.

¹⁵ E.g.: Bucher Ch.A. Are We Losing the Olympic Ideal? *SI*, 1955, Aug. 8 ; How to Try Too Hard. *Ibid.*, 1960, 15 Febr. ; Sportsmaster Brundage. *Ibid.*, Sept. 5.

¹⁶ Bucher Ch. A. Are We Losing the Olympic Ideal?

¹⁷ Events & Discoveries. *SI*, 1956, Apr. 16.

¹⁸ Glavnyi vopros. *FiS*, 1960, no. 5.

¹⁹ Sobolev P. Vremena menjaiutsja. *FiS*, 1960, no. 4.

²⁰ Botashev M. *FiS*, 1960, no. 6, color plate.

²¹ Neugasimoje plamja. *FiS*, 1960, no. 8.

²² Golub i lavr. *FiS*, 1960, no. 2.

²³ Vtorzhenije v gegemoniju amerikantsev. *FiS*, 1960, no. 10 ; “Koroleva sporta” v Rime. *FiS*, no. 11.

²⁴ “Koroleva sporta” v Rime.

²⁵ The Russians Are Coming. *SI*, 1960, Febr. 15.

²⁶ E.g.: Terrell R. The Heroes of Squaw Valley. *SI*, 1960, Febr. 29.

²⁷ Terrell R. The Games Were the Best. *SI*, 1960, Mar. 7.

²⁸ Why Not Wave the Flag? *SI*, 1960, Aug. 15.

²⁹ Kane M. Splendor and Spleen. *SI*, 1960, Sept. 5.

³⁰ Passing vs. Points. *SI*, 1960, Sept. 12.

³¹ Stickler L. Meanwhile, Back on this Planet. *SI*, 1960, Sept. 12.

³² Gumanizm i sport. *FiS*, 1964, no. 11.

³³ Kosygin A. Chlenam Mezhdunarodnogo Olimpijskogo komiteta, Meksikanskomu organizatsionnomu komitetu, uchastnikam XIX Olimpijskikh igr. *FiS*, 1968, no. 12; Idem. Chlenam Mezhdunarodnogo Olimpijskogo komiteta, organizatsionnomu komitetu i uchastnikam XX Olimpijskikh igr. *Ibid.*, 1972, no. 10.

³⁴ M.S. Gorbachev: "Vashimi podvigami voskhishchajutsja milliony ljudej". *FiS*, 1989, no. 1.

³⁵ Moreover, as the highest political level, until Richard Nixon arrived in the White House, the US government showed little interest in exploiting the Olympism in the Cold War discourse [17].

³⁶ As an article published on the eve of the Winter Games 1972 pointed out, this system was now extended to all socialist countries; "East Germany had been converted into an athlete factory in recent years, drafting promising children and putting them into early training almost as if they were race horses". E.g.: Johnson W. Ice-Cold Games and Solid-Gold Girl. *SI*, 1972, Jan. 31.

³⁷ Buckley W.F. Strange Bedfellows. *SI*, 1972, Sept. 25.

³⁸ Do You Believe in Miracle? *SI*, 1980, Mar. 3.

³⁹ Swift E.M. A Reminder of What We Can Be. *SI*, 1980, Dec. 22.

⁴⁰ Fimrite R. Only the Bears Were Bullish. *SI*, 1980, July 28.

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