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Elite army sport in Czechoslovakia 1945–1960

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Wojskowy sport wyczynowy w Czechosłowacji w latach 1945–1960

Streszczenie

Praca rekonstruuje proces formowania systemu czechosłowackiego wojskowego sportu wyczynowego w latach 1945–1960 r. Uwagę poświęcono powojennemu rozwojowi podstaw instytucjonalnych oraz wpływom zmian socjopolitycznych na badany obszar. Patronat wojska nad przygotowaniem sportowców wyczynowych stanowił logiczny punkt wyjścia ówczesnych warunków oraz modelowe rozwiązanie wprowadzane na wzór Związku Radzieckiego we wszystkich państwach tzw. bloku wschodniego. Po przejęciu władzy przez Partię Komunistyczną w lutym 1948 roku nadchodząca klasa rządząca przededefiniowała znaczenie wychowania fizycznego i sportu. Nie tylko sama sfera sportu wyczynowego pozbawiona została apolityczności i samodzielności, zdobywane wyniki elitarne pozwalały na prezentowanie osiągnięć systemu socjalistycznego. Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej w militarnej atmosferze zimnej wojny posiadało wyjątkową pozycję, która umożliwiała funkcjonowanie kierowanego przez państwo systemu przygotowań do sportu wyczynowego. W gestii finansowo silnego ministerstwa byli sportowcy pełniący dwuletnią zasadniczą służbę wojskową oraz żołnierze zawodowi. Powszechny obowiązek obrony ułatwiał identyfikację obiecujących osób, zaś wsparcie materialne oraz zaplecze materialno-techniczne oferowały bezkonkurencyjne warunki. Ponadto środowisko wojskowe nie stało w sprzeczności z ówczesnymi kodeksami sportów amatorskich, status żołnierza nie był w kolizji z ideologiczną zasadą własnej klasyfikacji obywatelskiej. Po okresie poszukiwania optymalnego układu organizacyjnego powstała struktura, której podstawowymi jednostkami były Wojskowe Drużyny Sportowe Dukla,

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które stanowiły podstawę reprezentacji sportowej wyznaczającej wysoki poziom światowy dla kilku następnych generacji.

Słowa kluczowe: wojskowy sport wyczynowy, wojskowy klub sportowy Dukla, państwowe kierowanie sportem, Czechosłowacka Armia (Ludowa), socjalizm.

Abstract

The paper explores the process of forming the system of top-level sports in the Czechoslovak armed forces during 1945–1960. Emphasis is placed on examining the postwar development of the institutional framework and the impact of sociopolitical developments on the subject matter. The army's support for the training of top-level athletes was a logical consequence of the conditions existing during that period and the adoption of the model practiced in the Soviet Union and in all countries of the Eastern Bloc. After the Communist Party took power in February 1948, the new government redefined the significance of physical education and sports. Sports at the top and lower levels were stripped of their apolitical nature and inherent purposes, as the prospects of achieving top-level performances presented a potential for using the achievements for propaganda purposes by the communist regime. Amid the militant atmosphere of the Cold War, the Ministry of National Defense had a unique status, which facilitated the functioning of a government-controlled system of top-level sports training. The ministry had strong financial resources, and its sports program encompassed both professional soldiers and conscripts fulfilling their two-year military duty. On the one hand, universal conscription facilitated the identification of high-potential individuals, and on the other hand, material support and technical resources offered conditions unrivalled elsewhere. Moreover, the military environment did not contravene amateur regulations in effect at that time, and a person's military status did not contradict his or her civilian ideological principles. Following a period of searching for the optimal structural framework, an organizational structure was established that relied on Dukla Military Sports Clubs, which formed the base of world-class national teams for several subsequent generations.

Keywords: top-level sport in the armed forces, Dukla Army Sports Club, government-controlled sport, Czechoslovak Army, socialism.

Following the end of the Second World War, the needs arose to restore the supply of goods, to reconstitute public administration, and to rebuild the armed forces. The restructuring of the military was based on universal conscription.¹ The ideological framework was laid down in the Košice Government Program, a strategic document adopted by the Czechoslovak government following its repatriation on 5 April 1945. Drafted with the sizeable contribution of Communist Party representatives, the program credited the Red Army for playing an exceptional role in liberation efforts, and as a result stipulated that “the organization, military equipment, and training in the new Czechoslovak armed forces were to match the organization, military equipment, and training in the Red Army.”²

¹ The Conscription Act had been in effect since Czechoslovakia gained independent statehood in 1918. In 1933, in consideration of the global situation, mandatory military service, which applied to men at the age of 20 years, was extended to two years.

² Košice Government Program. Retrieved from http://www.totalita.cz/txt/txt_kv.pdf

The fact that the priorities at the time included restoring the national economy and responding to high demand for workers in the civilian sector complicated sports training at the level of sports associations. During the complicated postwar period, in which food continued to be rationed, the military environment proved favorable for athletes because physical exercise was an integral part of the mandatory military training, regardless of the subsequent use of acquired abilities. Under a resolution of the Military Council attached to the Presidium of the Czechoslovak Government adopted on 5 June 1945, the management of physical education in the armed forces was assigned to the Central Administration of Education and Edification (CAEE), which was part of the Ministry of National Defense (MND).³ Subordinate to the Chief of General Staff, the CAEE subsequently initiated the assignment of successful athletes who were undergoing conscription duty to the Prague Garrison Command, where physical education units were established. Concentrating top athletes in a special unit allowed allotting resources to high-potential individuals within a compact structure. In addition, the Czechoslovak Army was a member of the Physical Education Committee of allied armed forces, through which it organized participation in the Championships of Allied Armed Forces held starting in 1946.⁴ Another opportunity for competition was the annual Britannia's Shield.⁵ Successful sports performances by athletes from the armed forces who represented the country were welcome by the regime.

In mid-1946, a sports unit designated as the Central Physical Education Unit (CPHU) was attached to the Physical Education School, which was temporarily located in a garrison facility in the Borough of Prague 2. The unit's commander was Staff Captain Adolf Dosoudil. One of the divisions became a core cell to which excellent competitors and coaches were assigned for the duration of their

³ J. Bílek, J. Lánik, J. Šach, *Československá armáda v prvním poválečném desetiletí [Czechoslovak Army in the First Postwar Decade]*, Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic, Prague 2006, p. 24. Operating based on the Soviet Union's model, the CAEE had six divisions and, apart from physical education and sports, oversaw ideological education for members of armed forces, was responsible for information released to the public, managed military music ensembles, coordinated art units and culture in the armed forces, and controlled military press and publishing, including the management of resources.

⁴ The Allied Forces Sports Council was established on 7 February 1946 as an international association tasked with using sports to deepen cooperation among the Allies following the Second World War. The founding countries included Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Great Britain, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russia, and the United States of America. In 1948, the Council was replaced with the International Military Sports Council, tasked with organizing sports events for members of the armed forces from more than 140 participating countries.

⁵ T. Masson, E. Riedi, *Sport and the Military: The British Armed Forces 1880–1960*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010, p. 229. Annual sports competitions organized by the Royal Air Force Sports Federation in reference to the Battle of Britain in 1940. Competition of Allied forces teams involving five disciplines (boxing, fencing, shooting, swimming, and cross country running).

conscription duty, subject to complying with the relevant requirements.⁶ Some of the initial CPHU members included runner Emil Zátopek and cyclist Jan Veselý. At the beginning of 1947, additional physical education units for athletes in the armed forces were established throughout the country based on a decision of the Ministry of National Defense. The units were located in Tábor, Brno, and Bratislava. Because the personnel mainly consisted of staff officers from the First Republic period, the preferred disciplines primarily included fencing, equestrian sports, shooting, and swimming. Before major or international races or competitions, athletes were summoned for qualifications that had the form of an elimination competition held in Prague. The same method was used to select army athletes for the national team. The participation of individual athletes subject to conscription in civilian competitions was conditional on approval by the commanding officer and consent granted by the CAEE. Eventually, sports activities carried out within the armed forces, separately from other sports activities, began to be perceived by the general public as having the sole objective of training athletes for representing the country in international competitions, with no regard for ordinary sports activities carried out by the general public.

Starting in February 1948, a massive campaign was launched in Czechoslovakia against professional sports and the use of money in sports.⁷ The purported utopian motivation for engaging in sports promoted by the regime included high moral credit and patriotism. Such attributes, however, were insufficient in generating competitive athletes for the needs of national representation. The contradictory state of affairs involved the need to increase the training load on the one hand, which was incompatible with holding a full-time job, and the fact that employment was mandatory on the other hand. A systemic solution that provided care for elite athletes, whose achievements were exploited for political purposes, was provided by a model of state professionals purported as fictitious amateurs. Legal cover meeting the formal requirements for amateur sports was provided by various state organizations, including the armed forces.

A major milestone in the separation of sports carried out under the auspices of the armed forces from other sports activities was Resolution 555/1948 of 15 August 1948, which laid down “the prohibition to release members of the armed forces for civilian sports competitions, with the exception of competitions of national importance”.⁸ Until then, athletes in the armed forces were permitted to

⁶ a) Competitors whose performance was recorded as the national record; b) winners of Czechoslovak Championships; c) winners of major national and international competitions; d) members of winners of Czechoslovak Team Championships; e) winners of teams representing Czechoslovakia in international competitions; f) competitors who received special commendations for their outstanding performances; g) outstanding trainers of excellent competitors in various sports fields.

⁷ J. Šimon (ed), *Nástup československé tělesné výchovy a sportu na novou cestu [Beginning of a New Direction in Czechoslovakia's Physical Education and Sports]*, Orbis, Prague 1953, p. 3.

⁸ Military Central Archives Yearbook 2019. Retrieved from <http://www.vuapraha.cz/rocniky%20VUA>

compete for and train with their civilian clubs. The oscillation between the civilian and military domains was dealt with through granting leave or stationing soldier athletes near their home clubs. However, granting a leave was a benefit unavailable to and negatively perceived by other soldiers, as athletes were indirectly privileged by being allowed to leave their units to meet friends as a reward for delivered performance.

In the aftermath of Czechoslovakia's attendance at the London Olympic Games in 1948, which was for the first time financed by the government, modifications were instigated of the existing sports structure with a view to securing sports achievements in the future.⁹ On 19 August 1948, the Physical Education Board of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia decided to establish the Physical Education Association of the Armed Forces. Owing to the centralization of physical education in the Sokol (*Falcon*) network, the association was renamed as the Military Sokol Council (MSC) on 1 September 1948. The MSC's responsibilities included methodological management of pastime and performance sports in the armed forces, where the organization was tasked with bridging the growing gap between top-level sports and public sports activities. The organizational structure covered 22 sports, and its jurisdiction included military education facilities converted into Army Sokol Associations, where the aim was to compensate for the departure of members caused by dissatisfaction and repression within what was the largest sports association. The organization was headed by Colonel Vilém Sacher.¹⁰ The MSC was disbanded in April 1950, when the oversight of physical education and sports in the armed forces was transferred back to the CAEE.

On 1 October 1948, efforts to create the best possible training conditions for top-level athletes in the armed forces culminated with the establishment of a special unit named Army Physical Education Club (APEC). The body was assigned the task of raising achievements to yet another level and to ensure that mandatory military service is conducive to improving the form of top-level athletes, as opposed to being detrimental. The introduction of a systematic training schedule translated into an increase in the proportion of APEC members in national teams. At the end of 1949, there were 219 athletes from 21 sports disciplines concentrated in three selective army units.¹¹ Apart from sport-oriented units, the organ-

⁹ Winners at the 1948 Summer Olympic Games who were full-time members of the armed forces included František Čapek, Július Torma, and Emil Zátopek who competed in the 10 km speed canoeing race, welterweight boxing, and 10K long-distance run, respectively.

¹⁰ Lieutenant General Vilém Sacher (1907–1987). A war hero, a member of the National Defense resistance group who later participated in resistance fighting in France and Great Britain. An artillery commander during the Battle of the Dukla Pass. After WWII, he worked at the General Staff at the Ministry of Interior. Cashiered for signing the Charter 77, rehabilitated posthumously.

¹¹ Track and field, basketball, boxing, cycling, soccer, gymnastics, handball, equestrian sports, canoeing, ice hockey, archery, skiing, modern pentathlon, swimming, shooting, fencing, tennis, rowing, volleyball, weightlifting, wrestling

izational structure was complemented with command sections, medical services, administration and support units, and a transport division. Thanks to conscription, which consisted of mandatory two-year military service for men who reached the age of 20, in combination with military competitions where athletes demonstrated their current level of performance, the system for selecting athletes for the APEC encompassed the vast majority of the target group.¹² New high-potential conscripts were identified on an annual basis in August. Likewise, successful athletes whose achievements were above the average were transferred to the APEC on an ongoing basis. The commander of the APEC was Lieutenant Colonel Josef Novák.

New army clubs, mainly specializing in collective sports, affected long-term competition standings as well as the rosters of individual teams. For civilian clubs were forced to transfer players to their newly established army counterparts, as military authorities were able to simply order the transfer of a desired athlete thanks to their official authority. The process caused a syndrome of expropriation without compensation, where forced transfers artificially concentrated the best athletes in their units because they benefited from unmatched resources. Practices to that effect were opposed, particularly by representatives of ice hockey and soccer. Nonetheless, their position did not allow them to bring about any change due to the systemic nature of support for such favoritism.

As part of reinforcing the socialist sports framework, military physical education was incorporated into the overall national concept of physical education. The emergence of new army-based sports clubs disrupted the established structure of sports associations. The government substantiated the inclusion of army clubs in league competitions and national championships by claiming that teams subject to a military discipline were of public benefit for civilian competitions and for participation in sport in general. Army sports clubs purportedly contributed to the cultivation of performance sports by acting as a role model vis-à-vis all stakeholders. Accordingly, in addition to sports competitions per se, army officials were tasked with promoting the concept of the ‘new man’ by endeavoring, often hypocritically, to bring about a change in players’ and spectators’ world views.

The ATK Praha [*APEC Prague*] ice hockey club was incorporated into the highest national competition, the First Czechoslovakian Ice Hockey League, replacing HC Stadion Podolí, a club that was disbanded. In its premiere season, 1948/1949, ATK Praha placed third, winning the title in the subsequent year.¹³ The APEC soccer team qualified for the highest competition following their victory over the winner of the Trade Union League, MZK Pardubice, and placed eighth in its first season. In assessing the performance of athletes from the armed

¹² I. Roháčková, *Šedesát pět let armádního vrcholového sportu: kapitoly z dějin a současnosti ASC Dukla [Sixty-Five years of Top-Level Sports in the Armed Forces: Chapters from the History and Present of ASC Dukla]*, Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic, Praha 2013. p. 15.

¹³ K. Gut, V. Pacina, *Malá encyklopedie ledního hokeje [Small Ice Hockey Encyclopedia]*, Olympia, Prague 1986, p. 33.

forces, a conference held at the end of 1949 presented the following data: seven team championship titles, three runner-up placements, and two teams that placed third in national competitions.¹⁴ Achieved results provided evidence that the targets set for the APEC had been met, as its individual divisions gradually began to be transformed into national teams tasked with representing the country. The increasingly clearly exhibited purpose of the APEC, operating under the command of Major Josef Malík during 1949-1950, suggested that restructuring would occur soon.

In 1949, self-help efforts allowed for completing the construction of a so-called Barracks Camp at the Strahov Stadium's Old Field. The new complex provided a sufficient accommodation capacity, allowing all of the APEC's sports divisions to be relocated to a single location. At the end of the 1940s and beginning of the 1950s, more and more athletes were joining the armed forces with the status of professional soldier. Paradoxically, at a time when top-level sports in the armed forces were consolidated into a single location, advancing professionalization was differentiating between individual athletes, making such a state of affairs untenable.

In the spring of 1950, the command of the APEC was assigned to Staff Captain Josef Vaniček, but more importantly, a reshuffle carried out at the Ministry of National Defense resulted in the appointment of Alexej Čepička as Minister of National Defense on 25 April 1950.¹⁵ His predecessor, Army General Ludvík Svoboda, was appointed as the President of the National Council for Physical Education and Sports amid extensive purges within the armed forces. Čepička's appointment was followed by the introduction of a new framework of rules and regulations in the armed forces. Fundamental changes in the system of military physical education were based on the "Order to Establish the Czechoslovak Army Stadium and to pursue the development of military physical education and sports."¹⁶ Apart from renaming the Strahov Stadium, the order designated the APEC as the exclusive user of its facilities, which were to serve for top-level military races and competitions. Moreover, the ministry's decree required commanders to engage in developing the physical fitness of their subordinate staff and improving their health and resilience. The desired state of affairs was to be achieved by a combination of mandatory military training and optional sports ac-

¹⁴ I. Mohorita, *20 let Dukly Praha: příspěvek k dějinám tělovýchovy a sportu v Čs. lidové armádě* [Twenty Years of Dukla Prague: Contribution to the History of Physical Education and Sport in the Czechoslovak Army], Naše vojsko, Prague 1968, p. 17.

¹⁵ Alexej Čepička (1910–1990), communist politician, minister, son-in-law of Klement Gottwald. Minister of Interior Trade and later Minister of Justice. A member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Minister of National Defense during 1950-1956. Dismissed from all high-ranking party positions in 1956.

¹⁶ A. Čepička, *Za nerozbornou obranu vlasti: sborník statí, projevů a rozkazů* [For the United Protection of the Homeland: Collection of Essays, Speeches, and Orders], Naše vojsko, Prague 1954, pp. 52–54.

tivities at all levels of the organizational structure. At the end of the text, the decree proclaimed emphatically, “Every soldier must be an active athlete. Every soldier must carry the Tyrš Badge of Physical Fitness!”

The government defended rising favoritism towards army-backed sports by arguing that matters concerning national defense are of public interest, as opposed to applying to a narrow part of the population. The armed forces were portrayed as elite that played a major role in building socialist society. This interpretation was based on the implied notion that concentrating the best athletes in individual sports in the armed forces was merely an expression of the shared intent to promote the ideological visions of socialism. Starting on 1 January 1951, athletes received meals conforming to Standard L, which guaranteed adequate caloric intake.

In October 1951, the APEC was transformed into the Army Physical Preparation Unit (APPU), which was subordinate to the Combat Preparedness Administration (CPA), a section of the Ministry of National Defense, specifically the ministerial Department of Physical Education and Sports. Until 1953, the command of the organization was held by Captain Bohdan Konáš. In public appearances, its officials acted as members of the Central Army House (CAH). The APPU’s base consisted of the National Representation Division, where athletes were assigned to five units – gymnastics, light athletics, collective games, heavy athletics, and winter sports. Each of the units was divided into four sections corresponding to the respective sports.¹⁷ In addition, the APPU took over the responsibilities of the former Military Physical Education School, as a result of which it also comprised a unit tasked with training military commanders and physical education trainers. The new organization was assigned responsibility for three main areas. They included training for reconnaissance operations, training for sports coaching and management, and national representation. The last mentioned reflected the fact that sports in armed forces were to take over all representation duties, where the Helsinki Olympic Games in 1952 were to be the first time this concept was to be used.

During the summer, the successful presentation at the Olympic Games in Finland was echoed in the domestic context, where measures were taken to exploit the victorious performances. Czechoslovakia’s team won seven gold, three silver, and three bronze medals, which made it the seventh most successful nation. On 1 October 1952, the existing national representation concentrated in the armed forces was split into two divisions. The camp at the Strahov Stadium mainly served for housing conscripts. For this purpose, the APPU was renamed Army Physical Education Unit. Army professionals and civilian employees of the military administration were concentrated under the Sports and Physical Education Association affiliated with the Central Army House. Athletes who had regular

¹⁷ Later, national representation was placed under the command of Staff Captain Karel Bártů, who participated in the modern pentathlon competition at the Summer Olympic Games in London in 1948 and worked as a sports official following the end of his sports career.

employment were managed by the MND directly through the Chief of the Main Political Administration. The unit was headed by Lieutenant Commander Jiří Soukup. As part of the restructuring, the Administration of Military Physical Education Facilities was established and tasked with the maintenance and use of the Czechoslovak Army Stadium and sports facilities adjacent to the Strahov complex, in addition to other facilities hitherto already used by the armed forces.

In 1952, the Křídla vlasti Olomouc [*Wings of the Homeland*] unit was established. It was subordinate to the Air Force Command and the MND, and its task was to represent the armed forces in soccer and ice hockey competitions. One year later, the Command Center of Tank and Mechanized Forces under the MND established the hockey club Tankista Praha [*Prague Tankmen*].¹⁸

The general trends toward the centralization efforts carried out in the course of 1953 were foreshadowed by Act No. 71/1952 Coll. on the Organization of Physical Education and Sports, which launched a period of centralized government management and control in physical education and sports. The law designated physical education as an inseparable part of socialist education and patriotism, where the entire sector was to be overseen by six centers under the control of assigned authorities.¹⁹ As regards the Ministry of National Defense, the law explicitly referred to the Central Army House and both of the separately managed sports organizations of the armed forces.

As a result of the redefinition of the physical education system, all Prague-based soldier athletes were transferred to the Representation Division under the Central Army House and continued to operate under this umbrella organization. Subordinate to the CPA, the entity acted as the management authority for all sports and physical education activities in the armed forces. Originally composed of five units, the organization was later complemented with a sixth unit for female athletes. All personnel were stationed in barracks at the Pohořelec District in Prague. The unit was under the command of Major Nikolaj Hrib until it was disbanded in 1956.

Following the complicated years 1948–1952, during which long-term training schemes were restricted due to lack of material, human and financial resources, top-level sports in the armed forces entered an era marked by a gradual improvement of conditions. The rising quality was reflected in results achieved by individual athletes. During 1953–1956, soldier athletes registered 19 world and 11 European records. The favorable circumstances accelerated the introduc-

¹⁸ In 1956, APEC Prague, Křídla vlasti Olomouc, and Tankista Praha were merged to create a new club that was initially based in Olomouc. Its transfer to Jihlava gave rise to Czechoslovakia's most successful hockey club ever, ASD Dukla Jihlava.

¹⁹ Apart from the Ministry of National Defense, the relevant authorities included the Ministry of Labor Forces, the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Education, Sciences, and Arts, the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement, and the Sokol Association, which was present in rural areas to a limited extent.

tion of modern training methods and approaches, subject to long-term planning schemes. In addition, all activities were carried out under medical supervision. Physicians in charge of providing comprehensive healthcare to athletes mainly included external associates Dr. Hubert Topinka and Dr. Miloš Trůbl.

Considering that centralized planning, the economic essence of socialism largely eliminated the correlation between the generation of income and proceeds from the sale of products and services, profit per se was not considered a relevant parameter. The period's propaganda needed to incite a proactive attitude to economic plans and motivate people to engage in their fulfilment. To that end, the regime used a distorted interpretation of competition that relied on non-market stimuli for intensifying and improving work results. Athletes had to commit to prescribed performance levels, similarly as members of agricultural cooperatives and workers in industrial establishments. Among athletes stood out runner Emil Zátopek, whose three gold medals from the Helsinki Olympic Games in 1952 inspired the so-called Zátopek Movement. In that regard, the APEC's initiative pledged to improve sports performance and ideological awareness:

Encouraged by the excellent achievements of our member, Comrade Emil Zátopek, patriotic devotee to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Bearer of the Order of the Republic, and a member of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Youth Association, all of us, communists and young adherents to the communist ideals associated under the APEC, want to learn to compete and win the way he does with a view to making our people's democratic republic flourish and contributing to the strengthening of peace throughout the world. Like Zátopek, we wish to seek and discover new forms of training, learn from the experience of the Soviet Union's sports masters, continue to improve our sports performances, and, simultaneously, study and engage in active political work in order to deepen our ideological awareness. It is our aim to provide the Communist Party, the Government, and all working-class people with evidence that means allotted to physical education and sport are used productively. We want to prove that our actions contribute to building our homeland and to raising new prizewinners, builders of bold future, and defenders of socialism in our gymnasiums and on our sports fields²⁰.

Subsequently, athletes in clubs throughout Czechoslovakia signed pledges to conform to internally defined future performance targets. Efforts along the lines of the foregoing included setting targets for the size of the membership base and placement in competitions as well as a framework for the political, cultural, and moral aspects of activities. In addition, efforts continued to produce better results than required, including attempts to break sports records.

As the level of sports performance improved, resulting in domestic and international achievements, sports celebrities from the armed forces were used to influence public opinion to the benefit of the regime. Propaganda aimed to earn the

²⁰ E. Bosák, *Zátopkovské hnutí: Odpověď komunistů a svazáků ATK na usnesení strany a vlády [Zátopek Movement: Response of APEC Communists and Young Communists to Party and Government Resolution]*, [in:] A. Janecký (ed.), *Lehká atletika: odborný měsíčník [Light Athletics: Specialized Monthly]*, Orbis, Prague 1953, p. 4.

population's trust through various forms of ideological deception, a role often assigned to sports heroes.²¹ Popularity induced this way was subsequently manipulated with the aim of being attributed to the Communist Party in a favorable fashion. To ensure the acceptance of thus created an image by the masses, the relevant individuals had to create an impression of being as civil as possible. To that end, CAH athletes took part in approximately 600 meetings in army units, in schools, and in factories during 1954-1955. In contrast, a negative factor that complicated the forming of positive publicity of sports in the armed forces was the fact that these athletes received obvious, targeted privileges. This expression of inequality, evident especially in collective sports, where athletes were transferred in a top-down manner, often complicated efforts to establish a permanent fan base.²²

In 1954, resources allocated to both the Czechoslovak Army's professional art ensembles and top-level sports disciplines were found excessive, and planning began for overall restructuring and decentralization. Changes introduced in the second half of the 1950s stemmed from the need to reduce the number of sports and physical education facilities that were transferred to the armed forces in the preceding period. In addition, the lasting dissatisfaction and opposition on the part of civilian club officials became a pressing problem because the deformed framework of competition sport at the top level had an adverse effect on the performance of all athletes due to lack of competitiveness.

At the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union held in February 1956, First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev delivered the 'Secret Speech' in which he denounced the methods and practices of the Stalinist government. Condemning the cult of personality allowed for approaching current affairs in a more sober manner. A revision of top-down administrative methods showed that the benefits of the government's role in the socialist system were overrated, and harmful bureaucracy, in addition to excessive concentration of resources in Prague, was identified in sports in the armed forces.

Based on a resolution of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia adopted on 7 June 1956, the Representation Division attached to the Central Army House was disbanded, and most sports teams were relocated outside Prague to various localities where Army Sports Clubs under the name Dukla were established in the framework of the Czechoslovak Army in accordance with Directives for Mass Sports Activities.²³ Decentralization spread sports disciplines across ordinary army units into various parts of the country. Apart from the capital, Prague, that included new facilities in Brno, Liberec,

²¹ P. Dušek, *Hrdina v totalitních médiích: srovnávací analýza olympijského vítězství Emila Zátopka (1948, 1952)* [*Hero in Totalitarian Media: Comparative Analysis of Emil Zátopek's Olympic Victories (1948, 1952)*]. Karolinum, Prague 2010, p. 69.

²² J. Kotrba, *Léta plná medailí [Years Filled with Medals]*, Naše vojsko, Prague 1988, p. 28.

²³ Military Physical Education Associations were established in a similar manner.

Hodonín, Pilsen, Pardubice, Kroměříž, Kolín, Terezín, and Košice. One year later, women's sports units for light athletics, artistic gymnastics, and volleyball were disbanded. Subsequently, women's sports units began to disappear from the armed forces. The gradually created model of top-level sports in the armed forces gained its final shape, some specifics of which have been preserved to this day.

Summary

The consequences of the Second World War weakened the potential of sports associations to provide resources for full-fledged sports activities. The army milieu possessed resources for assuming part of the responsibility for physical education, considering that physical exercise is an inseparable part of military training. Czechoslovakia's alignment with the Soviet Union, presaged in the Košice Government Program, foreshadowed the adoption of the organizational model used by the Red Army and subsequently the Soviet approach to physical education on the whole. The first specialized army physical education unit at the Prague Garrison Command was followed by similar units in Brno, Tábor, and Bratislava in 1946, a development that differentiated sports that conscripts specialized in. Following the communist coup d'état in February 1948, the military status of individuals was not in conflict with ideological principles, and legal cover allowed athletes to respond to the rising need for training time and resources relating to top-level sports. The abolishment of private ownership of means of production marginalized the private sector and its effect on top-level sports. Starting in October 1948, top-level athletes fulfilling the two-year conscription duty were concentrated under the Army Physical Education Club, whose units and teams began to compete in national competitions and championships. The appointment of Alexej Čepička as Minister of National Defense in 1950 gave the armed forces the exclusive use of the Strahov Stadium, originally intended for festivals of the Sokol association, as well as lasting support from a high-ranking official. From 1951, the Central Army House acted as an umbrella for both components of top-level sport – conscripts on the one hand and military professionals and civilian employees on the other. Starting with the Helsinki Summer Olympic Games in 1952, the armed forces assumed responsibility for national sports representation. Thanks to the ongoing improvement of training conditions, performances achieved by athletes in the armed forces were on a par with the world's elite. Success in both the domestic and international context attracted attention from the Czechoslovak public, where the popularity of sports celebrities was used for propaganda purposes by the single-party state. Athletes from the armed forces became a privileged instrument of power stratagems of communist apparatchiks, where trading moral integrity allowed them to achieve victories in the name of the oppressive regime that did not consider failure an acceptable option. The de-

parture from Stalinist practices initiated at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union extricated the sports disciplines in the armed forces from rigid centralism. Numerous army sports clubs, operating under the name Dukla, were established at local army units in various parts of Czechoslovakia. This structure continued to exist with some minor changes during several subsequent decades.

The outline of the concept for incorporating top-level sports into the armed forces had existed in Czechoslovakia already prior to 1948, the year of the communist coup d'état, and this form of organization therefore cannot be considered a purely communist invention. Sport in the armed forces gained a dominant role at the top level only after the communists seized power, where the aim was to control all available mechanisms with a view to promoting their interests. Thanks to its sovereign status, the communist regime was able to invert the purpose of sports by claiming that 'participating is not the point of sports, it is the winning that counts'. That was the fundamental tenet, and all actions in the domain of sport were directed at its fulfilment.

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