
Reviewed by John Soares, University of Notre Dame

*Defending the American Way of Life*, an entry in the “Sport, Culture, and Society” series of the University of Arkansas Press, is a welcome contribution to the growing literature on the intersection of sport and politics during the Cold War. This volume, edited by Toby Rider and Kevin Witherspoon, contains thirteen essays, plus an introduction and conclusion, by a mix of luminaries in the field of sport history along with some promising emerging scholars. The essays consider such issues as the links between governmental and non-governmental efforts to present the United States positively through sport while challenging Soviet propaganda; questions about amateurism and various kinds of cheating; gender roles and the importance of “real women” and “real men” to the conduct of the Cold War; and race as the “Achilles’ heel” of the United States in its quest to win hearts and minds around the world. (Disclosure: Witherspoon was the editor of a prize-winning article I wrote, and I also have been on panels with Rider and several of the contributors. In addition, I contributed to an earlier volume in this series.)

This collection does an impressive job of treating selected topics and largely provides a coherent understanding of the impact of the Cold War on international sports. Chapters are concise and well suited for classroom use. Readers will come away recognizing that U.S. athletes were not as innocent when it came to doping as journalists and spectators imagined at the time. Readers also will see that in many ways adherence to “white, middle-class” norms of femininity, a tortured racial history, and the preference for private action rather than government imperatives all hindered U.S. efforts to prove the superiority of U.S. democracy to Soviet-style Communism. It is a small point, but Mark Dyreson gets top marks for correcting an error about Olympic hockey at Lake Placid found in an exhibit on the U.S. flag at Fort McHenry (p. 220).

Readers will see how an array of impressive individuals represented the United States through sports during the Cold War. Dennis Gildea tells the story of Millard Lampell, a one-time college athlete who became a successful writer and a performer in the Almanac Singers—which included such notables as Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, and Burl Ives—and who was later blacklisted. Damion Thomas insightfully describes the challenges facing the African-American professional tennis player Arthur Ashe in taking a stand against apartheid in South Africa. In one of Witherspoon’s two chapters, he tells the story of track athlete Mal Whitfield, the first African American to win the prestigious Sullivan Award as the top amateur athlete in the United States. Whitfield had a career as a sporting diplomat that started before Jackie Robinson integrated baseball and continued well past the crest of the Black Power movement. Witherspoon explains how Whitfield “transformed from ‘good Negro’ to black radical” (p. 140). In a chapter with one of the best section subtitles ever—“The Tennessee State Tigerbelles Join the Cold War”—Cat Ariail explains the diplomatic effectiveness...
of the greatest Tigerbelle track star, Wilma Rudolph, who was a triple gold medalist at the 1960 Rome Summer Olympics. She later visited Africa “as a lone representative of the United States, an assignment that suggests that the State Department recognized that Rudolph seemed to singularly embody an idealized image of American democracy” (p. 151). In addition to speed and determination on the track, Rudolph had a charm and beauty that enhanced her effectiveness as a sports diplomat—and earned her 75 marriage proposals after the Rome Olympics, plus another 50 on a subsequent trip to Africa. John Gleaves and Matthew Llewellyn, in their chapter on “The ‘Big Arms’ Race,” cite the U.S. weightlifter Ken Patera, who, in anticipation of a 1972 Olympic matchup against a Soviet counterpart, memorably said that in Munich “we’ll see which are better—his steroids or mine” (p. 56).

Yet for all the book’s strengths, some readers may find the authors trying too hard to appear evenhanded in the U.S.-Soviet conflict. Some contributors’ claims about the ostensible Soviet commitment to gender equality ignore the persistent strains of sexism in the USSR that undermined official pronouncements. In making the case that U.S. journalists harped on Soviet cheating while downplaying U.S. wrongdoing, one essay complains about a New York Times article that failed to mention a U.S. swimmer “who inadvertently tested positive after using his asthma medicine” (p. 59)—an event that hardly ranks on par with systematic efforts by Communist states’ athletes to cheat and avoid detection. A claim that “the US media discourse changed direction” to focus on Soviet doping villainy “at the precise moment when the Soviets seized control of Olympic medal tables in the 1970s” (p. 59) is undermined by a later chapter’s revelation that the Soviet Union outdid the United States in medals at Melbourne in 1956 by a margin of 98–74 and four year later at Rome by the even more lopsided 103–71 (p. 90).

The short, easily digestible essays occasionally leave the reader wanting more. For example, when Witherspoon mentions that Whitfield “toured five nations with Muhammad Ali leading up to the 1980 Olympics” (p. 136), the reader wants to know more about Whitfield’s connection to Jimmy Carter’s efforts to promote a boycott of the Moscow Games. Witherspoon also describes Whitfield’s visit to “many underdeveloped nations, such as Laos,” in 1963. Given the then-recent agreement to neutralize that Southeast Asian country, in the context of growing U.S. involvement in neighboring Vietnam, Laos begged for a description more detailed than “non-aligned.” Discussion of Ronald Reagan and the 1984 Olympics smartly mentions the U.S.-Soviet hostility engendered by the September 1983 shoot-down of Korean Air Lines flight 007 but omits other relevant contemporary events: U.S. deployments of Pershing II missiles and ground-launched cruise missiles in Western Europe, and Reagan’s eventual surmise that his confrontational approach had reached its limits and that the time had come for a more conciliatory policy toward Moscow.

A final criticism concerns some of the book’s art. Many of the book’s photographic illustrations work beautifully. But the photograph of Rudolph displays neither the scissors-like strides that made her such a force on the track nor the glamorous looks that earned her a profusion of marriage proposals. The cover of the book contains a
striking color image of a female athlete, rearing back and ready to hurl a javelin, in a packed stadium with flags flying around the top. But it shows a Soviet athlete. The black-and-white rendering also accompanies Lindsay Parks Pieper's article on gender and sport, where it fits perfectly, but it is an odd choice for the cover of a book titled *Defending the American Way of Life*.

These complaints should not dissuade readers from this volume. It is an impressive and varied accomplishment and a significant contribution to the ongoing scholarly discussion of sport and politics during the Cold War.


**Reviewed by A. Ross Johnson, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars**

The Soviet Union established the Warsaw Treaty Organization (or Warsaw Pact) in May 1955 as an ostensible counterpart to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) founded by the United States, Canada, and ten West European countries in April 1949. An empty vessel or “cardboard castle” through the 1950s, the Warsaw Pact developed an institutional structure of councils, committees, and advisory bodies in the 1960s. This bureaucratic edifice was both consequence and facilitator of efforts by the smaller states in the Soviet bloc—Albania (initially), Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania—to use the alliance structure to pursue autonomous foreign and security policy agendas. The seven non-Soviet Warsaw Pact (NSWP) states, as they came to be known, were ruled by Communist regimes imposed by Soviet occupation, subversion, and pressure (Albania was a partial exception) and, as demonstrated in 1989, remained existentially dependent on Soviet influence and ultimately Soviet military force for their survival (and, in the case of East Germany, the survival of the state).

Within these constraints—quite different from relationships within NATO—the NSWP states pursued differentiated international initiatives in the 1960s. Romania refused to back the USSR in the Sino-Soviet dispute and defied East Germany by establishing diplomatic relations with West Germany. Romania also developed a special relationship with the United States and other Western countries. The sweeping liberal reforms in Czechoslovakia during the 1968 Prague Spring threatened other Soviet-bloc regimes, spurring the Soviet Union to crush the Prague Spring with military force. Poland and East Germany espoused maximalist positions on West German issues in an unsuccessful effort to force final international legal recognition of Poland’s Western border (demarcated provisionally in the Potsdam Agreement) and East Germany’s right to exist as a separate state (in the absence of a German peace treaty). Hungary sought with some success to improve economic ties with the West and to limit conflict within the Warsaw Pact that might interfere with that objective. Albania,