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The Beautiful Game as a Soviet Game: Sportsmanship, Style, and Statecraft during the Golden Age of Soviet Soccer

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THE BEAUTIFUL GAME AS A SOVIET GAME: SPORTSMANSHIP, STYLE, AND
STATECRAFT DURING THE GOLDEN AGE OF SOVIET SOCCER

By

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Bachelor of Arts, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, Ohio, 2014

Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Wright, Caleb, MA, June 2018

Major
History

The Beautiful Game as a Soviet Game: Sportsmanship, Style, and Statecraft during the Golden Age of Soviet Soccer

Chairperson: Robert H. Greene

At the end of World War Two, the Soviet Union occupied a new global position and found itself in a Cold War with the West. Cold War conflict occurred in a variety of areas, including military, political, and economic. Additionally, athletics became an arena of direct competition between capitalist and communist nations. Victory in the Olympics, World Cup, and other international tournaments became just as important as economic success or advancements in military technology. In many sports, such as ice hockey, the Soviet Union achieved superiority over the West, but regarding soccer, the nation's most popular sport, the USSR struggled to accomplish consistent success.

The first national team of the Soviet Union lost early in its first tournament, but then brought in new players and coaches. The rebuilt roster won the next tournament and ushered in the most successful years of Soviet soccer, also known as the Golden Age. The period lasted from 1956 through 1966 and witnessed the only two international championships ever won by the Soviet Union. Many of the greatest soccer players in Soviet soccer history played during this era and propelled the national team to its greatest victories.

Despite the success on the field, questions and conflicts off the field continually transformed the characteristics of Soviet soccer. How did an influx of non-Russian soccer stars change the concept of masculinity in the Soviet Union? What types of behavior did Soviet authorities consider inappropriate and how did they propose to remedy such conduct? How did Soviet coaches integrate Soviet cultural values into their tactics and strategies while remaining competitive with Western nations? In what ways did political and military conflict affect how Soviet soccer was played and who they competed against? Overall, the Golden Age of Soviet soccer was an era not only of athletic success, but also a period of transformation that mirrored changes in Soviet society as a whole during the same years.

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Introduction

In Yuri Olesha's 1927 novel *Envy*, a soccer match doubles as the site of competition between contrasting ideologies.¹ In front of 20,000 boisterous spectators, a Moscow-based soccer team hosts an exhibition match against a visiting German team. Though many of the fans support their local squad, others are excited to watch the star German striker Goetske. The crowd is enthralled with his skill and foreign demeanor, but as soon as the Soviet team runs onto the pitch, they switch their excitement back to their home team. Leading the Soviet squad is goalkeeper Volodya Makarov. He is a "professional athlete," who despite his talent, plays modestly and "passionately desired victory for his team and worried about each of his players."² However, at least one spectator continues to support Goetske and the German team. Nikolai Kavalero is a young man who has rejected the new communist system and its value of collectivism. Instead he dreams of attaining his own individual glory. He places his allegiance behind Goetske, who has achieved the individual recognition to which Kavalero aspires. Furthermore, he wishes for Goetske to score to humiliate Makarov, whom Kavalero despises for thriving in the communist system. Therefore, Goetske acts as the embodiment of Kavalero on the soccer field. Thus, the match is not only an athletic competition, but a competition between Western individualism and Soviet collectivism.

From the opening moments of the match, the Germans, with the wind at their backs, are continually on the offensive. Goetske's reputation proves well-deserved, leading attack after attack against the Soviet defense. However, Makarov is equal to the task, repeatedly saving

¹ For the purposes of this paper, I use American vocabulary and refer to the sport as soccer instead of football (except when used in a direct quote). However, in an effort to limit repetition, I use transatlantic vocabulary in reference to different aspects of soccer. Therefore, games will also be called matches, coaches as managers, teams as squads or clubs, fields as pitches, etc. Additionally, "the Beautiful Game" is a common nickname for soccer which originated in the 1950s but was popularized by Pelé's 1977 autobiography "My Life and the Beautiful Game."

² Yuri Olesha, *Envy*, trans. Marian Schwartz (New York: New York Review Books, 2004), 137.

Goetske's shots and keeping the score level. After each acrobatic save, the crowd reacts with louder and louder cheers. Just before halftime, Goetske finally beats Makarov and puts the Germans ahead 1-0. Still, during halftime, fans swarm Makarov and lift him into the air, celebrating his performance.

Olesha's description of the soccer match, though fictional, displays an idealized version of soccer in the Soviet Union. First, the hero of the match is not the goal-scorer Goetske, but the masculine Soviet man of action, Makarov. He does not play passively as a goalkeeper (which by nature is a largely reactionary position) but exerts control over the game and even over the laws of nature as well. Makarov "would catch the ball in midflight, when it seemed mathematically impossible... Volodya wasn't catching the ball, he was ripping it from its line of flight, like someone who has violated the laws of physics and was hit by stunning action of thwarted forces."³ Makarov's physical style of play makes him a masculine figure; Olesha emphasizes Makarov's strength and physical features throughout the description of the match and halftime. Goetske and Kavalero, on the other hand, do not display the same physical presence or intrepid attitude displayed by the Soviet goalkeeper. Despite his talent, physically, Goetske "turned out to be a short, swarthy-faced, round-shouldered little man" and "looked like a gypsy."⁴ Kavalero does not portray a masculine persona either, due to his inability to act decisively when the moment demands it. During the first half, the ball is struck out of play and into the stands. It ultimately stops at Kavalero's feet but "[he] was passive" and another spectator must grab the ball at his feet and return it to the field.⁵ Kavalero imagines the entire crowd laughing at his inaction, which compounds his hatred for Makarov and the new Soviet society.

³ Ibid, 136.

⁴ Ibid, 134, 141.

⁵ Ibid, 140.

Another defining Soviet characteristic of Makarov is his commitment to the collective. Despite being the star of the team, Makarov values “the overall progress of the game, the overall victory, the outcome” over his own performance.⁶ In contrast, Goetske “treasured only his own success” and played “for himself, at his own risk, neither taking nor giving help.”⁷ The two players are complete opposites: one defensive and one offensive, one modest and the other arrogant. It is noteworthy that at halftime Makarov is congratulated while Goetske is ignored by the fans.

Lastly, Olesha’s soccer match displays the value of soccer on the formation of national identity. Soccer was the most popular sport in Europe; match results and stars players were internationally known. For example, Goetske’s fame reached beyond the boundaries of Germany to the Soviet Union and likely throughout the rest of Europe. Presumably, a Moscow victory over the Germans would also create news not only in the Soviet Union, but in Germany as well and perhaps Makarov’s heroic performance could earn him an international reputation like that of Goetske. During the match, Makarov is aware of the international importance of the competition and is eager to impress the foreign opposition. Olesha writes, “He was also interested in what opinion the famous German was forming about the Soviet game... he felt like shouting to Goetske then: ‘Look how we’re playing! Do you think we’re playing well?!’”⁸ Representing his nation well was important to Makarov; this is again contrasted with Goetske, who “was not there to support his team’s honor” and despised even his own teammates.⁹

Curiously, Olesha never reveals the final outcome of the match. Kavalero, the novel’s narrator, leaves at halftime with the Soviets trailing 1-0. There are hints that the Muscovites will

⁶ Ibid, 137.

⁷ Ibid, 138.

⁸ Ibid, 137.

⁹ Ibid.

come back in the second half when the wind is at their back and Goetske tires.¹⁰ However, regardless of the final result, the Soviets are already ideologically victorious. Makarov's first half performance proved the superiority of Soviet masculinity, collectiveness, and national pride over its Western counterparts. The final score was merely a minor detail.

Nearly twenty years after the publication of *Envy*, a Moscow soccer team faced a similar situation. In November 1945, Dinamo Moscow traveled the United Kingdom to play four exhibition matches against four storied British clubs. The tour's official purpose was to foster a spirit of friendship and cooperation between the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union. From the British perspective, this tour was a distraction to the post-war economic depression and a welcome return to international soccer. However, for the Soviets, the tour was much more than a series of friendly matches. Soccer had been the most popular sport in the Soviet Union, both in terms of participation and spectator attendance, during the interwar period. Yet, the Soviet Union had not concerned itself with international competition, forgoing participation in the Olympic games and the World Cup. Therefore, Soviet soccer garnered little respect from the rest of the world. Success in Britain, the birthplace of soccer, would prove the competitiveness and skill of Soviet soccer teams and their style of play. Moreover, victory for Dinamo would be more than success on the soccer field; like Makarov's success over Goetske and Kavalero, a Soviet victory would also be proof of the superiority of Soviet ideology.

Few, especially in Britain, expected Dinamo to achieve victory. Instead of playing an untitled German team, Dinamo competed against historic clubs such as Chelsea and Arsenal. Furthermore, in place of the fictional Goetske, the Soviet team faced the threat of real-life stars

¹⁰ Evidence suggests Olesha based his match on an actual game between a Moscow soccer club and a German workers' team, which the Soviets won 4-1. See Victor Peppard, "Olesha's *Envy* and the Carnival," in *Russian Literature and American Critics*, ed. by Kenneth N. Brostrom (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1984), 183.

Tommy Lawton and Stanly Matthews. Lastly, the Moscow squad would not be playing at home in front of 20,000 spectators, but on foreign soil in front of over 100,000 fans. The British sport press appreciated Dinamo's play, but still expected a complete British victory. A *London Times* report, while acknowledging Dinamo's ball control and speed of play, doubted if they could compete with British teams, writing "It remains to be seen how this [the British style of play] will affect Moscow Dynamo's play over here. Showy football and football under intense pressure can be rather different things..."¹¹ In other words, Dinamo's style might succeed in the Soviet Union, but the physicality and aggression of British teams was expected to overwhelm the Soviets.

Amazingly, the tour was a massive success for the Soviets. Out of four games, Dinamo won twice and tied the other two. Furthermore, Dinamo's conduct and style of play reflected Soviet values of collectivism displayed in *Envy*. While Soviet strikers like Vsevolod Bobrov and Konstantin Beskov drew praise, it was Dinamo's goalkeeper, Alexei Khomich, who became the star. His reflexes and athleticism earned him the nickname "Tiger" from the English fans. Even when Dinamo scored ten goals in a single match, a reporter for the *London Times* reported "Khomich, who is surely one of the best of goalkeepers, stood head and shoulders above their colleagues in the defence."¹² Still, as a squad, Dinamo also displayed an emphasis on collective attitude and team play. In a victory over the London-based Arsenal Football Club, the *London Times* noted "What was clear was the Russian superiority in collective ball-control... compared with [Dinamo's] team-work that of Arsenal was painfully ragged and uncertain."¹³ Finally,

¹¹ "Russians at Stamford Bridge." *London Times*, 11.13.1945.

¹² "Cardiff Outplayed by Dynamo" *London Times* 11.19.1945.

¹³ "Dynamo Beat Arsenal in the Fog" *London Times*, 11.22.1945.

Dinamo's success elevated the international perception of Soviet soccer. Even British clubs began adopting Dinamo's style of play and preparation after the tour.

Soviet Soccer History

Dinamo's victories were such a surprise to Great Britain and the rest of Europe due to the Soviet Union's unremarkable soccer history. In the early 1860s, English and Scottish sailors introduced soccer to Russia through port cities like Saint Petersburg and Odessa. Though soccer immediately became popular with local Russian citizens, it was not until 1879 when the first all-Russian match took place between two factory-organized teams in Saint Petersburg.¹⁴ By the beginning of the 20th century, soccer had become popular enough to warrant the creation of a city-wide tournaments. The Aspden Cup (a Saint Petersburg tournament) of 1908 signaled a dramatic shift in Russia's soccer landscape. The traditionally strong team Nevsky, operated by and comprised of foreigners, lost the tournament final to Sport, an entirely Russian team. After Sport's victory in 1908, Russian teams not only gained confidence to play foreign teams within Russia, but also began to invite professional teams from Europe. Yet, hopes for success in international competition were quickly dashed. In 1910, European teams toured Russia in a series of exhibition matches. Corinthians, a successful Prague-based club, played three matches, outscoring their Russian opponents by twenty-one goals. Later that year, a team of English professionals also played three exhibition matches. They won all three games by a combined score of 31-0.¹⁵ However, the largest international soccer embarrassment occurred in 1912. The Tsarist government intended the Stockholm Olympics to be a dramatic leap forward for Russian

¹⁴ Louise McReynolds, *Russia at Play: Leisure Activities at the End of the Tsarist Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 102.

¹⁵James Riordan. "Tsarist Russia and International Sport," *Stadion* 14 (1988): 227.

sports but resulted in what the Russian press labelled a “Sporting Tsushima,” in reference to Russia’s military disaster in the Russo-Japanese war.¹⁶ The soccer team was the most emblematic of the catastrophe. After losing their first game to Finland, Russia lost to Germany 16-0, a record goal differential in international competition at the time.¹⁷

By the time the Bolsheviks gained power, soccer had firmly rooted itself in Russian culture; so much so, that the new regime needed to incorporate soccer into Marxist ideology and the structure of the new government. In Moscow, Soviet authorities placed prerevolutionary soccer clubs under the control of proletarian and state organizations.¹⁸ During the 1920s and 1930s, Soviet sport officials focused on improving soccer domestically and using sport to strengthen Soviet culture. Soviet teams played dozens of foreign clubs, both hosting them in the Soviet Union and traveling abroad. Most of these matches resulted in a Soviet win.¹⁹ The Soviet state used these victories as examples of how amateurs from a socialist society were superior to bourgeois athletes. Yet, while the Soviet Union considered their players amateurs, they were so in name only. Players and coaches were officially members of a proletarian or government organization but devoted their time exclusively to training. Therefore, it is no surprise that Soviet “amateurs” defeated foreign teams that were truly comprised of non-professional players.

When soccer professionals did tour the Soviet Union, the result exposed the true level of Soviet soccer. During the Spanish Civil War, a team of Basque all-stars touring Europe agreed to play several matches in the Soviet Union in an effort to raise awareness of their struggle. The Basque team defeated Dinamo Moscow 2-1, tied Dinamo Leningrad, and recorded easy victories

¹⁶John D Windhausen, “National Identity and the Emergence of the Sports Movement in Late Imperial Russia,” *History of European Ideas* Vol. 16, No. 4-6 (1993): 874.

¹⁷James Riordan, “The Development of Football in Russia and the USSR: Part I,” *New Zealand Slavonic Journal* 10 (1972), 69.

¹⁸Robert Edelman, *Serious Fun: A History of Spectator Sports in the USSR* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 45. Also see James Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 94.

¹⁹Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 49-51.

against Dinamo Kiev, Tbilisi, and Minsk. Spartak Moscow claimed the only Soviet victory, but even that required questionable refereeing that favored the Soviet team.²⁰ Not only were the Basques superior in individual skill, but they exposed the outdated tactics, formations, and training methods of Soviet teams. Even *Pravda*, the official newspaper of the Communist Party acknowledged this gap in skill, stating “The performances of Basque Country in the USSR showed that our best teams are far from high quality... Improving the quality of Soviet teams depends directly on matches against serious opponents.”²¹

World War Two interrupted the progress of Soviet soccer, but the sport still proved useful to Soviet society by providing a nation of physically fit men ready to become soldiers. During the war, a Soviet commander wrote in a letter to the periodical *Fizkul'tura i Sport*, “We owe it to the sports organizations that Soviet People were trained and had imparted to them such qualities as courage, persistence, will power, endurance, and patriotism.”²² The war had proven sports’ utility to the Soviet Union. Yet, it also destroyed the sporting infrastructure of the nation. Soccer was the sport that revived most quickly, perhaps because of its prewar popularity or because the simplicity of the game required little more than an open patch of field. The Soviet Top League resumed play only weeks after Germany’s surrender. Fans overcrowded derelict stadiums and teams scrambled to assemble full rosters, but overall, soccer offered a return to normalcy for Soviet citizens.²³

Therefore, the Dinamo tour of 1945 served as the catalyst for a new era of Soviet soccer. The British were stunned that players from a devastated nation with little soccer history had defeated the best teams from the country that invented the game of soccer. In the Soviet Union,

²⁰ Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 63-64.

²¹ Jonathan Wilson, *Inverting the Pyramid: The History of Soccer Tactics* (New York, Nation Books, 2013), 79.

²² Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, 154

²³ Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 87.

the tour's success encouraged Soviet officials to continue competing internationally. Over the next two decades, the Soviet Union experienced the most successful years in Soviet soccer history, including two international championships and the prime playing years for many Soviet soccer greats. In addition to winning, the Soviet Union strived to play in such a way that reflected and promoted Soviet values of collectivism and sportsmanship to both domestic and foreign audiences.

The Soviet state controlled nearly all aspects of soccer during Stalin's last years. Soviet soccer reflected the authoritative, top-down structure of the Soviet government, extending from the Committee of Physical Culture and Sport through various subcommittees all the way to coaches and players. Just as average Soviet citizens were to obey the laws and policies of the Party, players and coaches also dutifully followed the rules imposed upon them. On the field, players operated inside a regimented strategy. Even in systems that allowed players to interchange positions, they did so as part of an organized formation; spontaneous, improvisational skills or movement did not fit into the Soviet system of soccer. Furthermore, soccer reflected the xenophobic nature of Stalinism by avoiding direct competition with capitalist nations, which in turn caused an absence of influence from Western European tactics and customs.

Yet, after Stalin's death and Khrushchev's assumption of power, the strict control of the government on society and soccer loosened. Khrushchev implemented many economic, political, and social reforms aimed at moving away from Stalinism. As before, Soviet soccer mirrored the structure of Soviet government; Soviet players and coaches increasingly gained freedoms regarding coaching and playing style. The Soviet Union proactively engaged with soccer teams from around the world and Soviet coaches adapted elements from Western European and Latin

American soccer into the Soviet style. Players had opportunities to express their individuality and began to resemble their capitalist counterparts. These new freedoms were limited, even in terms of soccer, but were freedoms nonetheless.

Chapter Previews

This thesis explores the relationship between soccer and identity in the Soviet Union during the 1950s and 1960s. These decades were years of dramatic transformations within the Soviet Union, and soccer was not insulated from such changes. As the country struggled to move away from Stalinist attitudes and policies, soccer, too, attempted to move on from practices common during Stalin's era. Additionally, in the 1950s, the USSR began competition in international sports and was dominating sporting events by the 1960s, especially in the fields of ice hockey and the Olympic games. Soccer, however, did not enjoy such immediate success. This does not mean the decades were an embarrassment. In fact, the '50s and '60s were the most successful years for the national team and the prime playing years for many Soviet soccer greats. Therefore, soccer writers have labeled these years the "Golden Age of Soviet Soccer." Yet, even during its "golden age," Soviet soccer often occupied a second-tier status in international soccer; not a weak team, but not considered one of the world's best.

The thesis will be divided into three chapters, each examining the relationship between identity and a particular feature of Soviet soccer. The first chapter explores how Soviet soccer players displayed Soviet values and Soviet masculinity. In Soviet culture, the concept of masculinity constituted more than physical ability; it also included being cultured, modest, and politically active. Therefore, Soviet players were first required to be proper Soviet citizens. This meant Soviet players needed to display excellence and sportsmanship on the field, and

refinement and class off the field. Such expectations also extended to soccer fans in the Soviet Union. Just as the players were required to respect their opponents and the referee, spectators were expected to do the same. Soviet officials determined that to achieve such behavior, ideological-political education was more important than athletic training. However, this chapter shows that as the USSR began competing internationally, Soviet players and fans witnessed Western forms of sportsmanship, spectating, and even hooliganism, which began mixing with and undermining preexisting Soviet values.

The second chapter examines how Soviet soccer players and coaches emphasized the value of collectivism in their play. Dinamo's 1945 tour set an example for future Soviet teams in terms of both success and style. While the Soviet Union national soccer team, which was formed in 1952, achieved only occasional success, it did replicate the collective style of play which came to be the defining characteristic of Soviet soccer. The pinnacle of Soviet soccer success was a gold medal at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics and winning the inaugural European Nations Cup in 1960. Yet, even as the USSR reigned as champions of Europe, teams around the world continued to change and advance their tactics and style; Soviet coaches had to modify their style to keep up with the rest of the world. This chapter argues that Soviet coaches adapted Western tactical innovations but kept the principle of collectivism at the center of the Soviet style of play. These adaptations allowed the Soviet national team to remain competitive and successful throughout the 1960s.

Lastly, the third chapter focuses on the role soccer played in Soviet foreign policy. The Soviet Union national soccer team differed from other Soviet national teams in two important ways. First, as the most popular sport in the Soviet Union, the team faced more pressure from the Soviet public to be successful. Secondly, since soccer is the most popular sport globally, the

national soccer team competed against a wider range of nations, which included nations in political conflict with the Soviet Union. At times, this political tension spilled over into the athletic arena through means such as boycotts or extra-physical play. This chapter focuses on the soccer relationship between the Soviet Union and Hungary and how it reflected their changing political relationship. In the early 1950s, the Hungarian national team was the best in the world; the Soviet Union attributed their success to socialism, which produced naturally superior players. However, after the Hungarian crisis of 1956, many of the national team's best players, abroad at the time of the revolt, refused to return. Many of those stars relocated to Spain, which irritated both Hungarian and Soviet officials. The Hungarian team ultimately rebuilt itself, and by the mid-1960s, the USSR, Spain, and Hungary were three of the top teams in the world. This chapter argues that high-profile matches in the European Championships and the World Cup further strained the political tensions that existed between these nations during the Cold War.

Historiography

This thesis engages with four distinct but connected historiographies. First, this thesis deals with the historiography of masculinity and fame in the Soviet Union. In "Yuri Gagarin and Celebrity Masculinity in Soviet Culture," Erica L. Fraser argues that after the death of millions of male soldiers in World War Two, the Soviet Union actively sought to "remasculinize" the military and Soviet society. Cosmonauts involved in space exploration became the focus of reestablishing masculinity, and Yuri Gagarin was the prime example. Gagarin's masculinity was not only defined by his bravery and heroism, but also by his charisma, political savvy, and devotion to his family. Therefore, it was not action alone, but also personal intelligence and

integrity, that defined masculinity in Soviet culture.²⁴ This concept of masculinity extended beyond cosmonauts to other forms of celebrity as well. Julie Gilmour and Barbara Evans Clements have examined the presentation of Soviet athletes (fictional, male athletes used in propaganda posters) and the Soviet concept of masculinity. They conclude that Soviet media regularly featured physically fit males not only to inspire healthy living, but also the discipline and hard work needed to achieve such a physique.²⁵ Expanding on the presentation of Soviet athletes, Evelyn Mertin has examined how sports heroes served as role models in the Soviet Union. She argues that Soviet sports organizations not only expected Soviet athletes to inspire through athletic achievements, but also through political engagement and moral behavior. Mertin uses two case studies (runner Vladimir Kuts and gymnast Ludmilla Tourishcheva) to illustrate how Soviet publications presented athletes as ordinary people who achieved extraordinary feats through hard work and good behavior.²⁶ My project also explores how Soviet athletes modeled ethical behavior. In contrast to Mertin's work, however, I examine the presentation of Soviet soccer players, who were more regularly covered by the media and arguably more well-known than Olympic athletes.

Secondly, my project adds to the growing scholarship on sports in the Soviet Union. One of the first historians to examine the Soviet system of sports was James Riordan. He worked as a Russian linguistics professor in the United Kingdom but lived and studied in Moscow during the 1960s. Riordan's 1977 study, *Sport in Soviet Society*, offers a detailed description of the structure of Soviet athletics as well as the goals, such as physical fitness and conformity, that the Soviet

²⁴ Erica L. Fraser, "Yuri Gagarin and Celebrity Masculinity in Soviet Culture." In *Gender, Sexuality, and the Cold War*, ed. Philip E. Muehlenbeck (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2017).

²⁵ Julie Gilmour and Barbara Evans Clement. "If you want to be like me, Train!" In *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture*, ed. Barbara Evans Clement, Rebecca Friedman, and Dan Healy (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

²⁶ Evelyn Mertin "Presenting Heroes: Athletes as Role Models for the New Soviet Person," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* Vol. 26, Issue 4, 469-483. 2009.

state sought to instill in the citizenry through sport. Riordan's work, though comprehensive, makes little argument for the effectiveness of Soviet sport programs. He does argue that athletic organizations in the 1920s and 1930s prepared Soviet society for mobilization during World War Two, but his analysis of the development of post-war sports programs is minimal. Instead, Riordan's focus remains on the structural formation of Soviet sport and his main contribution is demonstrating that sport played an important part in Soviet life.²⁷ In contrast to Riordan's top-down view of sport in the Soviet Union, Robert Edelman takes a bottom-up approach to Soviet sports. In *Serious Fun: A History of Spectator Sports in the USSR*, Edelman contrasts the state's priorities of sport with the public's priorities.²⁸ He argues that while the Soviet Union sought to achieve victory in international competitions, especially the Olympics, the Soviet public did not view Olympic champions as idols, but instead longed for more entertaining and higher quality domestic sports. Edelman's other major work is *Spartak Moscow: A History of the People's Team in the Worker's State*, an analytical history of the players, coaches, and fans of one of the most successful clubs in the Soviet Union.²⁹ He argues that Spartak created a culture more politically and culturally diverse than other Soviet teams and therefore became the favorite club in Moscow and throughout the Soviet Union.

This thesis draws substantially on both Riordan's and Edelman's works. Each contains information from archives otherwise inaccessible for my research. Edelman has also personally conducted interviews with former players, coaches, and journalists to whom I would not have access. However, this project differs from theirs through its singular focus on soccer.

²⁷ James Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

²⁸ Robert Edelman, *Serious Fun: A History of Spectator Sports in the USSR* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

²⁹ Robert Edelman, *Spartak Moscow: A History of the People's Team in the Workers' State* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2009).

Additionally, my analysis of Soviet soccer extends to strategy and tactics, aspects of the game rarely mentioned by Edelman or Riordan. Another difference, though minor, is Edelman's definition of the "Golden Age of Soviet Soccer." In two of his works, he defines this period as roughly 1945-1950, when soccer popularity dramatically increased following the end of World War Two.³⁰ However, I consider the "Golden Age of Soviet Soccer" as 1956-1966. During this decade, soccer remained popular, featured the best years from soccer stars such as Igor Netto and Lev Iashin, and were the most successful years for the Soviet national team.

Thirdly, this thesis interacts with literature concerning Soviet foreign policy and sport. James Riordan continues his analysis on sport and the Soviet Union with "Sport and Soviet Foreign Policy." In this essay, Riordan states that sport served five distinct purposes within the realm of foreign relations: To promote positive relations with pro-Soviet groups, to promote neighborly relations with bordering states, to win support for the USSR in third world nations, to reinforce the unity of the socialist community and the Soviet "vanguard" position within it, and to attain global sporting supremacy. Riordan notes that international sport policy was always at the whim of Soviet foreign policy. This caused frequent contradictions in international sport policy, such as a fervent passion for Olympic tradition during the 1980 Moscow games, followed by an enthusiastic boycott of the Olympics during the 1984 Los Angeles games.³¹ Even before the boycotts of the 1980s, Olympic participation proved to be a complicated endeavor. In *Red Sport, Red Tape: The Olympic Games, The Soviet Sports Bureaucracy, and the Cold War*, author Jennifer Parks states that Soviet sports administrators were hesitant to join the Olympic

³⁰ Edelman uses the phrase "Golden Age of Soviet Soccer" in two chapter titles in two separate works. In *Spartak Moscow*, he describes the period as 1945-1948, while in "Spartak in the Golden Age of Soviet soccer," in *Euphoria and Exhaustion: Modern Sport in Soviet Culture and Society*, ed. Nikolaus Katzer, Sandra Budy, Alexandra Kohring, and Manfred Zeller (New York: Campus Verlag, 2010), Edelman defines the period as 1945-1952.

³¹ James Riordan, "The Role of Sport in Soviet Foreign Policy," *International Journal* Vol. 43, No. 4 (Autumn, 1988) 569-595.

movement for fear of defeat and subsequent embarrassment. It was only when Soviet officials were confident that Soviet athletes would defeat Western, capitalist nations that they put their support behind entry into the Olympics.³² Yet, few works address the soccer aspect of these nations' relationship. In *Behind the Curtain: Travels in Eastern European Football*, soccer journalist documents the rise and fall of the Hungarian national teams and places the blame for its disintegration on the Soviet Union but does little to provide a political context.³³ In *The Franco Regime*, Stanley Payne only briefly mentions how sport reflected Soviet-Spanish relations. In response to Khrushchev's criticism of his fascist regime, Franco boycotted the 1960 European Championship in order to prevent the Soviet team from traveling to Spain.³⁴ This thesis adds deeper analysis to Soviet sport and foreign policy, specifically regarding Hungarian and Spanish relations. Furthermore, I argue that by boycotting tournaments and welcoming Hungarian exiles, Franco used soccer as a method of retaliation against Soviet criticism.

Lastly, this thesis contributes to the emerging historiography of the connection between sports, particularly soccer, and national identity. In *Inverting the Pyramid: The History of Soccer Tactics*, Jonathan Wilson details how the culture and history of a nation has a direct influence on the style of soccer adopted.³⁵ Soccer historian David Winner examines the development of Dutch soccer beginning in the 1950s. He argues that the unique style of soccer played by Ajax Amsterdam and the Dutch national team were the result of the Dutch history of manipulating and economizing land combined with the changing, free-thinking culture emerging in the 1960s and 70s.³⁶ More recently, non-soccer historians have examined the link between soccer and culture.

³² Jennifer Perks, *Red Sport, Red Tape: The Olympic Games, the Soviet Sports Bureaucracy, and the Cold War* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017).

³³ Jonathan Wilson, *Behind the Curtain: Travels in Eastern European Football* (London: Orion Books, 2006).

³⁴ Stanley Payne, *The Franco Regime* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 531.

³⁵ Jonathan Wilson, *Inverting the Pyramid: The History of Soccer Tactics* (New York, Nation Books, 2013).

³⁶ David Winner, *Brilliant Orange: The Neurotic Genius of Dutch Soccer* (New York: Overlook Press, 2008).

Laurent Dubois examines the French National Team as a microcosm for a French society confronting the difficulties of unity and ethnic diversity.³⁷ In *Citizens and Sportsmen*, Brenda Elsey studies Chilean soccer at a local level and illustrates that both amateur and professional teams were also politically active; therefore, those fans who supported a particular team were declaring de facto allegiance to their preferred political party.³⁸ *The Country of Football* is a collection of articles by mostly Brazilian historians tracing how soccer has permeated nearly every aspect of Brazilian life, politics, and economy.³⁹ This thesis incorporates many of these themes as well, examining how the cultural and political changes of the 1950s and 60s transformed Soviet soccer, how Soviet fans viewed ethnic non-Russian players, and how soccer became a mode of political expression for both fans and players outside of traditional governmental institutions.

Sources and Methodology

Soviet sport periodicals are the foundation of my research on questions surrounding Soviet identity and soccer. *Sovetskii Sport* and *Futbol i Khokkei* are the publications I use the most. Additionally, *Pravda* and *Izvestia* also covered important soccer events, such as international tournaments and cup finals. The Soviet sport press coverage consisted of more than only match reports. Players and coaches often gave interviews, explaining their training routine or coaching philosophy. Soviet journalists also published brief biographies of soccer stars, describing their personal and athletic development to becoming successful players. Lastly, sport

³⁷ Laurent Dubois, *Soccer Empire: The World Cup and the Future of France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

³⁸ Brenda Elsey, *Citizens and Sportsmen: Futbol and Politics in Twentieth-Century Chile* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

³⁹ *The Country of Football: Politics, Culture, and the Beautiful Game in Brazil*, ed. Paulo Fontes, and Bernardo Buarque De Hollanda, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

periodicals frequently published fan letters, thus offering a window (albeit selective) into fans' perspectives. Therefore, Soviet media provides more information into how soccer players and the sport as whole was viewed than Western newspapers. I also use foreign newspapers to analyze Western reactions to Soviet soccer abroad. American newspapers from this time period rarely covered international soccer; therefore, I mostly use British newspapers such as *The London Times* and *The Glasgow Evening News*.

In addition to press coverage, I use autobiographies and tactical guides written by Soviet players and coaches. Many of the Soviet stars from the 1950s and 1960s wrote autobiographies after their retirement. This includes Igor Netto, Nikita Simonian, and Lev Iashin, among others. Coaches including Valeriy Lobanovskiy, Konstantin Beskov, and Mikhail Iakushin, wrote autobiographies as well. During their careers, many coaches also wrote strategy books, outlining their methods of coaching, player development, and tactical approach to soccer. These guides reveal the reasons for their style of play and what they believe makes Soviet soccer different than other approaches to the game of soccer.

Lastly, when possible, I analyze broadcast footage of matches as a third method of evaluating the style of play used by Soviet teams. In large part, this match footage will only be from international tournaments and involve the Soviet National Team. For this assessment, I am relying on my experience playing soccer from childhood through playing on a university level team to evaluate and distinguish between different offensive or defensive strategies and tactics.

In summation, one might not readily associate sports with culture and politics, but the study of sport in the Soviet Union offers unique insights into cultural values and societal changes. Soccer reveals the complexity of Soviet masculinity, the nature of Moscow's relationship with the periphery, and the importance of collectivism in everyday Soviet life.

Ultimately, soccer reveals the changing image of what it meant not only to be a Soviet athlete, but a Soviet citizen. Past studies of Soviet sports focused on sports other than soccer. However, due to its popularity and ubiquity, Soviet soccer reflected the transformation of the Soviet Union more profoundly than other sports.

Chapter 1: Forging Heroes and Fighting Hooliganism: The Soccer Players as Model Soviets

In the 1956 Melbourne Summer Olympics, the Soviet national soccer team reached the semifinals of the tournament through impressive play. Through the first three matches, the Soviets outscored their opponents a combined six to one. The team's success was a partial relief, especially considering their failure of four years prior. The 1952 Helsinki Olympics were the first games in which the USSR had competed. While the majority of the Soviet athletes fared well in the Helsinki Olympics, the soccer team's results did not meet the expectation of victory; the team did not advance beyond the round of sixteen. They returned to the Soviet Union as disappointments, and many of the players from the 1952 squad never played for the national team again. Though the 1956 squad had surpassed the previous Soviet team, the goal was always to win a gold medal.

In the semifinal match against Bulgaria, the likelihood of winning gold seemed out of reach. Though the Soviets scored prolifically in their earlier matches, regulation time against Bulgaria ended scoreless. In the first five minutes of extra-time, Bulgaria netted a go-ahead goal. Scoreless for ninety minutes, the Soviets now had only twenty-five minutes to equalize. Many of the Soviet players were fatigued; in the quarterfinals, the match against Indonesia ended in a scoreless draw, forcing an extra game. The USSR comfortably won the replay match, but the extra 90 minutes of play meant that the Soviet players on the field against Bulgaria were not as fresh as their opponents. Among the Soviet players who had played the extra match was striker Eduard Streltsov.

In the match against Bulgaria, Streltsov played well, but was unable to score during regulation; his best attempt on goal sailed just high of the crossbar. With only eight minutes left

in extra-time, Streltsov capitalized on a mistake by the opponents. Bulgaria failed to clear a ball out of their half. Streltsov collected it in the middle of the field, dribbled towards goal, and placed his shot out of the reach of the Bulgarian goalkeeper. After scoring the equalizing goal, the match's momentum shifted completely to the Soviets. Four minutes later, Streltsov took possession near the touchline, beat his defender down the field, and crossed the ball in front of goal. Teammate Boris Tatushin tapped the ball in, securing the Soviet Union a spot in the gold medal game.⁴⁰

The Soviet Union ultimately won gold at the 1956 Olympics. It was their first international championship, but Streltsov was not on the field for the final. The Soviet coach Gavriil Kachalin had a habit of starting forwards who played together at the domestic level. Though Streltsov was fit, his teammate from Torpedo Moscow, Valentin Ivanov, had been injured in the match against Bulgaria. As a result, Streltsov did not play in the championship match. At the time, the Olympics only awarded medals to players who competed in the final. Therefore, Streltsov did not receive a gold medal. His replacement, Nikita Simonian, offered him the gold medal, but Streltsov refused. "Nikita," he replied, "I will win many other trophies."⁴¹

Unfortunately, this prediction did not come true. Before the next Olympics, Streltsov fell out of favor with Soviet soccer administrators. Streltsov's play was creative, but also aggressive. In the second week of the 1957 season, Streltsov scored a match-winning goal against Spartak Minsk. Only ten minutes from the start of the game, Streltsov won the ball in the middle of the pitch and dribbled past two defenders before striking the ball into the goal; it would be the only goal of the game. However, Streltsov was not the hero of the match. Twenty minutes after his

⁴⁰ "Football Match to Remember," *London Times*, 12.6.1956

⁴¹ Jonathan Wilson, *Soccer Behind the Curtain*, 269.

goal, he violently fouled a Spartak Minsk midfielder, causing the referee to eject Streltsov from the match.

Afterwards, discussion of the game revolved around Streltsov's foul, not his goal. *Sovetskii Sport*, the Soviet Union's premier sports periodical, thoroughly condemned Streltsov's actions: "Can this man... a regular player for the USSR, be the hero of the match? No!"⁴² The journalist went on to describe Streltsov's as a "hooligan" and "bully," and the foul as an "outrageous act that spoiled the entire match."⁴³ The criticism came not only from sports writers. In the following issues of *Sovetskii Sport*, soccer fans wrote letters to the newspaper to express their dissatisfaction with Streltsov. "Although he scored the only goal," wrote one fan, "he can hardly serve as an example for athletes... He is a bully that violated the norms of sportsmanship." This fan emphasized a distinction between Streltsov and other Soviet soccer icons. "We know many sportsmen who have won the respect and love of millions of fans... Streltsov should learn from their example."⁴⁴

The condemnation of Streltsov was not only focused on his egregious foul. Match reports, editorials, and fan letters included criticism of his style of play. A sports journalist deemed his play too "theatrical."⁴⁵ One fan described him as "Not a high-class soccer player, but an arrogant master [*barin*], strolling about the field, waiting for the ball."⁴⁶ Therefore, the disapproval of Streltsov was not only because of one particular foul, but stemmed from a popular perception that Streltsov's style of play put himself above his team. Fair play and responsibility trumped success on the field; selfishness, laziness, and individualism had no place in Soviet

⁴² S. Levkov, "Eto ne geroi." *Sovetskii Sport*, 4.13.1957.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ P. Khidzhakadze, "K chemy eto barstvo?" *Sovetskii Sport*, 4.18.1957.

⁴⁵ S. Levkov, "Eto ne geroi." *Sovetskii Sport*, 4.13.1957.

⁴⁶ P. Khidzhakadze, "K chemy barstvo?" *Sovetskii Sport*, 4.18.1957.

soccer. The case of Eduard Streltsov raises the question: If Streltsov's style did not reflect Soviet soccer values, what type of play did?

In 1949, respected Soviet soccer coach Boris Arkadiev wrote an editorial previewing the upcoming season and reflecting on past Soviet soccer achievements. He recalled the success of Dinamo Moscow's tour of Great Britain in 1945 and attributed the victory not just to tactics or skill, but to the character of the Soviet team. He wrote: "...[Dinamo] brilliantly demonstrated the original Soviet school of football which is so sharply distinct from foreign approaches... Above all, it is the high moral and physical character of the players. It is a spiritual collectiveness of play."⁴⁷ A year later, *Sovetskii Sport* echoed Arkadiev's statements, writing "Collectivism is the distinguishing characteristic of our football... What is the basis of the Soviet style? The answer lies in collectivism, in close interaction; in the absence of *iachestvo* [me-ism]."⁴⁸ Therefore, the foundation of Soviet soccer was more than just formations, tactics, or training methods. It emphasized collectivism, moral integrity, and an industrious, unselfish work ethic. The Soviet school of soccer developed a distinct style, one derived from the coaches' and players' identity as Soviet men and Soviet citizens.

Masculinity in Postwar Soviet Culture

World War Two devastated the population of the Soviet Union; the massive loss of life most profoundly affected the populace of young men. Women filled both military and industrial roles and attained prominence in both public and private spheres. Therefore, after the end of the war, Soviet society was more feminine than ever, and in the eyes of Soviet officials, in need of

⁴⁷ Boris Arkadiev, "Zavtra nachinaetsia pervenstvo Sovetskogo Soiuzo po futbolu," *Sovetskii Sport*, 4.16.1949.

⁴⁸ *Sovetskii Sport*, 11.11.1950, as quoted in Robert Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 93.

“remasculinization.”⁴⁹ In order to achieve this, Soviet men and boys needed masculine role models to emulate. War heroes were natural choices, but athletes were also viable candidates. As a result, depictions of sport in Soviet press after World War Two predominately displayed male participation in sports.

The work of famed Soviet painter Alexander Deineka reflected this shift. His prewar paintings encouraged mass participation in sports by both genders. Many of his works often featured women participating in both casual and highly-organized athletics. However, his postwar paintings emphasize masculine athletes. His 1947 painting *Relay Race of Ring Road B* depicts a cross-country race in the outskirts of Moscow. Deineka includes three female athletes in his scene, but each occupy a subsidiary role to their male teammates, literally passing them the baton for the next leg of the race.⁵⁰ In 1950, another Soviet artist Sergei Grigoriev received a Stalin Prize for his work entitled *The Goalkeeper*. In this scene, the main figure is a young boy, dressed in shabby clothing among the rubble of a war-torn city. He is set as if to face a penalty kick, but the opposing player is out of frame. A crowd of other young children gather around the scene in anticipation. The young goalkeeper’s face is stern as he stares at his opponent while the two young girls who are included are completely removed from the athletic competition; they are resigned to spectating and holding their baby dolls. The ruined cityscape suggests a desire to return to normalcy whilst rebuilding from the war, and the strong, determined young boy is the focal point of that reconstruction.⁵¹ Depictions of masculine figures saturated periodicals as well. Postwar issues of *Sovetskii Sport* often featured illustrations of muscular men with young boys emulating. These pictures focused on the discipline required to achieve such a physique. Slogans

⁴⁹ Fraser, “Yuri Gagarin and Celebrity Masculinity in Soviet Culture,” 272.

⁵⁰ Mike O’Mahoney, *Sport in the USSR: Physical Culture – Visual Culture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 153.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 159-160.

such as “If you want to be like me train” and “Train to make your body like steel.”⁵² Therefore, the emphasis is not only on the end result, but also the process of masculinization.

However, Soviet masculinity was not only concerned with athleticism and physique. It extended beyond the physicality to the morality of athletes. Soviet athletes’ actions were expected to promote communist values, such as modesty, discipline, collectivism, and cultural and political involvement. Whatever personal shortcomings or off-field issues occurred in the lives of Soviet sport icons were ignored or covered up in order to preserve the image of an incorruptible athlete.⁵³ Overall, the Soviet concept of masculinity extended beyond simple physical ability; it included a commitment to Soviet morals, political awareness, and engagement with art and culture.

Ideological-Political Education

Such expectations for Soviet sportsmen extended to soccer players and coaches as well. In postwar Soviet culture, soccer resumed quickly and regained its prewar popularity. Tens of thousands of spectators routinely packed stadiums every week throughout the Soviet Union. Therefore, in order to spread the ideals of Soviet masculinity through athletes, soccer players were the most valuable due to their fame and visibility. Yet, in the first few years following the end of the war, many players did not embody Soviet values. Fights, willful violations of rules, harsh fouls, and a lack of respect for referees and coaches were commonplace throughout Soviet soccer.

The Soviet Soccer Federation took on the responsibility of addressing the issue. They feared that instead of adopting positive traits from Soviet players, fans would replicate the

⁵² Clement and Evans, “If You Want to Be Like Me, Train!”, 211-212.

⁵³ Mertin, “Presenting Heroes,” 479.

violence, disrespect, and unethical behavior they witnessed on the soccer field. The Soviet Soccer Federation was comprised of proper Soviet citizens and communists, many of whom were former soccer players or coaches.⁵⁴ However, the Soviet Football Federation was under the authority of the Committee of Physical Culture and Sport, which was not comprised of former soccer players or athletes, but bureaucrats.⁵⁵ It is difficult to determine how often the Committee of Physical Culture and Sport overruled or forced decisions from the Soviet Soccer Federation, but it is logical that the Soviet Soccer Federation better understood the intricacies and details of soccer. Therefore, one organization focused on political ideology while the other focused on the game itself, but both were responsible for the quality of Soviet soccer.

Soviet officials turned to education to fix the problem. They determined the reason behind the uncouth behavior, and even poor athletic performance, was a lack of political ideology. Consequently, coaches were now required educate players on Marxism-Leninism, lead excursions to museums, and even read Stalin's biography. Furthermore, the Soviet Soccer Federation required coaches to provide detailed lists of the ideological-political education they provided their players. In some cases, coaches were already including cultural and political engagement as part of their training regimen. TsSKA (Central Sports Club of the Red Army) head coach Boris Arkadiev had long been regarded as highly cultured and even read the poetry of Alexander Blok to his players.⁵⁶ In contrast, Dinamo Moscow coach Mikhail Iakushin did not embrace ideological education. The minimal education he did provide centered around themes that might practically affect his team's performance, such as hygiene or muscle memory.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ For Example, Valentin Granatkin, who chaired the federation during the 1950s and 1960s, had played goalkeeper for Lokomotiv Moscow in the 1930s and 1940s.

⁵⁵ Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, 210.

⁵⁶ Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 97.

⁵⁷ Edelman, *Spartak*, 167.

Additionally, USSR officials considered rough, unprincipled play a characteristic of Western, anticommunist soccer. As a result, Soviet teams ceased any foreign competition between 1948 and 1950. Officials even encouraged the Sovietization of soccer's vocabulary. Many terms were Russified versions of English terms, but Soviet officials believed that Russian was a language "rich enough to express the appropriate concepts." Therefore, *khavbeck* became *poluzashchitnik*, *forvard* became *napadayushchii*, and *gol'kipер* became *vratar*. There was even an effort to replace *futbol* with *noznoi myach* (the literal Russian translation of "football").⁵⁸ On the surface, it might seem the emphasis on ideological-political education worked. Dinamo Moscow and their educationally negligent Iakushin often underperformed while the highly cultured Arkadiev led TsSKA to five championships in the next six years. However, fouls, fights, and a lack of respect for authority continued just the same.

The 1951 season in particular saw an increase in unsportsmanlike behavior from players and coaches. Early in the season, Zenit Leningrad visited Dinamo Tbilisi. Midway through the match, a Zenit player, Kratsev, intentionally stomped on his opponent's foot. The referee ejected Kratsev and suspended him for the following match as well. Naturally, *Sovetskii Sport* disapproved the purposeful foul, but reserved its harshest condemnation for Zenit's coach. Following the match, Zenit players held a meeting, at which the manager was presumably present, to discuss discipline. Still the coach ultimately appealed Kratsev's suspension of the next game. "What is the price of [the coach's] 'principled' speech at the players' meeting," asked a *Sovetskii Sport* journalist, "if he immediately intercedes for the violator of discipline?" The report further argued that such appeals undermined the ideological education of the players: "The case of Zenit indicates that not all football coaches are clearly aware of their tasks in the matter

⁵⁸ "Na futbol'noe pole," *Sovetskii Sport*, 7.20.1948. This shift away from Western terminology was indicative of Zhdanovism, the Soviet cultural policy of conformity, socialist realism, and opposition to the West.

of educating players.”⁵⁹ By midseason, a special meeting of the Soviet Soccer Federation occurred to address disciplinary issues. They concluded that “as a result of the weakening of control by the football department... insufficient attention is paid to the issues of political and educational work” and increased the role of political commissars in teams’ educational programs.⁶⁰

This, however, was still not enough to stem the tide of unsportsmanlike behavior. The most scandalous and embarrassing match of the season occurred only a month after the soccer union’s meeting. Two high-profile clubs, Shakhtar Stalino and VVS Moscow, engaged in an ugly and poorly played match. Early in the first half, Shakhtar captain Alexander Ponomarev fouled an opposing defender. VVS’s captain, Konstantin Krizhevskii rushed towards Ponomarev, striking the Shakhtar player and injuring him. Krizhevskii was consequently ejected from the match and VVS had to play with only ten men of the field. Still, Shakhtar was unable to capitalize. Though Ponomarev returned in the second, neither side scored. The best chance occurred when Shakhtar winger Viktor Fomin broke through the defense but could not beat the goalkeeper. Soviet reporters were quick to criticize Fomin’s squandering on an easy scoring opportunity. Naturally, the poor play stemmed from a lack of Soviet values. “Donetsk soccer players are hampered by Fomin’s extraordinary fascination with individual play... This young soccer player has a dash of narcissism.”⁶¹ The only player praised by the press was the Shakhtar goalkeeper, but even then, the compliment was tainted by concerns of individualism: “Brave play, good reactions, successful positioning... Yet in rebuke, [Shakhtar’s goalkeeper] should put aside the desire to be spectacular and acrobatic, which reduces the reliability of his game.”⁶²

⁵⁹ A. Basmanov, “Trener dolzhen byt’ printsipialen!” *Sovetskii Sport*, 4.24.1951.

⁶⁰ “Reshitel’no uluchshit’ vospitatel’nuu rabotu,” *Sovetskii Sport*, 6.30.1951.

⁶¹ S. Savin, “Nesportivnoe povedenie kapitanov,” *Sovetskii Sport*, 7.31.1951.

⁶² *Ibid.*

The Shakhtar-VVS match was an embarrassment to the Soviet Soccer Federation for a variety of reasons. First, many of the egregious fouls were committed by Soviet stars, not mediocre players. Ponomarev led the Soviet league in goals scored that year and won the Ukrainian Soccer Player of the Year award; Fomin had won the same award the previous year. Krizhevskii captained a prestigious Moscow-based club and would later feature as a member of the Soviet Union national team. Such unsportsmanlike behavior was unacceptable from any Soviet player, let alone the top players in the league. Secondly, the match confirmed Soviet officials' belief that a lack of political education not only led to undisciplined actions, but also poor performance. "Both teams played meticulously," commented *Sovetskii Sport*, "but tactically were boring."⁶³

The concerns over discipline and performance peaked in 1952. That summer, the Soviet Union assembled its first national soccer team to compete in the Helsinki Olympics. TsSKA had won five of the last six Soviet championships; therefore, Boris Arkadiev managed the national team which also consisted of many of his own players, but also featured Dinamo Moscow striker Konstantin Beskov and VVS's Krizhevskii. Given Dinamo Moscow's success in 1945 and a general faith in the superiority of the Soviet athlete, hopes for victory in the Soviet Union were high. However, the national team lost dramatically in the second round to Yugoslavia. The defeat was so embarrassing *Sovetskii Sport* did not report on the game.⁶⁴ Soviet officials attributed the team's failures to incompetent coaching by Arkadiev; not tactically, of course, but politically. Officials described the cultured Arkadiev as an "apolitical intellectual" whose "constant use of foreign words" hindered communication between him and his players.⁶⁵ Ultimately, Arkadiev

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ *Sovetskii Sport*, 7.26.1952.

⁶⁵ Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 107.

lost his honorary “Master of Sport” title; so too did Beskov and Krizhevskii. After the Olympics, the 1952 season resumed, but to minimal coverage by the Soviet press. Several weeks into the season, *Sovetskii Sport* finally published the league standings; TsSKA was not listed. The Soviet Soccer Federation removed Arkadiev as coach, disbanded the team, and distributed its players to other squads.

The Olympic defeat in Helsinki seemed to be proof of the need for ideological-political education. The Soviet press blamed nearly every incident of harsh fouling or unskilled play on a lack of ideological-political education. Even the top Soviet teams and players suffered from a deficiency in such education; the national team, comprised of the best players and coaches the USSR had, demonstrated that. In truth, however, it was the emphasis on education and, more importantly, the avoidance of soccer outside the Soviet Union. The squad that travelled to Helsinki, in general, was old. Many of the players had been playing for over a decade. The busy schedule of an Olympic tournament, where games are more frequent than the season, quickly tired the Soviet squad. Secondly, Arkadiev did not manage his aged players well, opting to start nearly identical lineups in consecutive matches. Lastly, by not playing any matches against foreign opponents in the years leading up to the Olympics, the Soviets either underestimated or were ignorant of the skill of their opponents. Igor Netto, one of the few young players included on the 1952 roster, concluded that the Soviet team was simply not skilled enough to win. “No one was guilty,” he determined, “Simply we were not experienced enough, not very well prepared, and inferior in teamwork to our rivals.”⁶⁶ In 1945, Dinamo Moscow displayed a different tactical approach to soccer which allowed them to dominate their British opposition.⁶⁷ However, world soccer had changed and evolved since then, whereas Soviet soccer had not. The

⁶⁶ Igor Netto, *Eto Futbol* (Moscow: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1974), 53.

⁶⁷ Dinamo's tactical innovation and advantage will be discussed more in-depth in Chapter 2.

constant emphasis on ideological-political education ignored the importance of training and conditioning, which is what the national team needed to succeed in the Olympic tournament.

The End of Stalinism and the Rebirth of Spartak

Entering 1953, the quality of Soviet soccer was deteriorating. The soccer stars of the past decade, such as Vsevolod Bobrov, Konstantin Beskov, though still playing, had aged and lacked the energy, strength, and skill they once possessed. The failure of the USSR national team the previous summer shook the belief of Soviet officials and the public of the superiority of the Soviet athlete and the value of ideological-political education. Fans still attended matches by the tens of thousands, but their calls for something different grew louder and more frequent. Soviet soccer needed to be transformed.

The first dramatic change in the 1953 season occurred roughly a month before the season began. On March 5th, 1953, Joseph Stalin died. Stalin himself was, at best, only an intermittent fan of soccer. However, Lavrentii Beria, former head of the NKVD and close ally of Stalin, took a great interest. He often manipulated the Soviet league through forcing unfair player transfers, buying referees, and arresting opponents of his two favorite teams: Dinamo Moscow and Dinamo Tbilisi.⁶⁸ Yet, with Stalin dead, Beria's influence decreased dramatically and by midsummer, he was in prison. During the jostling for power in the Party, the emphasis of ideological-political education declined, and teams were able to manage their players and training as they saw fit. The Soviet Soccer Federation increased player wages, set high bonuses, and allocated a larger percentage of ticket sales to the teams. Consequently, clubs could provide better nutrition, transportation, and training facilities from their players with the additional

⁶⁸ See James Riordan, "The Strange Story of Nikolai Starostin, Football and Levrentii Beria," *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 46, No. 4 (1994). 681-690.

money.⁶⁹ The main beneficiary of Beria's absence was Spartak Moscow, Dinamo Moscow's long-time rival. They had won the title by a slim margin in 1952, but due to a shortened schedule to allow Olympic participation, the disbandment of TsSKA, and lackluster play, the Soviet press barely celebrated their championship.

Spartak were favorites to repeat as champions. Their squad boasted a surplus of young, creative talent unlike any other team in the league. Beginning in 1949, Spartak began overhauling their roster. The first major move was bringing Abram Dangulov as coach. Previously, the Armenian Dangulov had spent most of his career coaching in Southern Russia and Ukraine before ending up in Moscow. Due to his ethnicity, Dangulov attracted other, non-Russian players from the periphery of the Soviet Union. Most notably, Dangulov brought in Armenian striker Nikita Simonian and Estonian midfielder Igor Netto.

Simonian was a diminutive, but speedy, creative, and elusive center-forward. Black hair, bushy eyebrows, and standing 5'7", Simonian bore no resemblance to the Russian, masculine athletes depicted by Deinka or *Sovetskii Sport* the decade before, nor did he look like previous Soviet strikers like Bobrov or Beskov. Still, he became a star nonetheless. In his first year at Spartak, he led the Soviet League with twenty-six goals in thirty-four matches.⁷⁰ Netto was often the creator of those goals. Born in Moscow to Estonian parents, Netto was tall, slim, lanky, and had a long face with a large nose; he may have been more Russian than Simonian, but still did not resemble the ideal Soviet athlete. Netto was physically slow but a skilled passer with excellent vision and anticipation. As Spartak's central midfielder, his ball possession and accurate passes controlled the tempo of the game. Created by Dangulov and fueled by Simonian

⁶⁹ Edelman, *Spartak Moscow*, 203.

⁷⁰ "Soviet Union 1949" *RSSSF*, <http://www.rsssf.com/tabless/su49.html#491>.

and Netto, Spartak played an attractive style of soccer founded on quick passing and ball possession.

Dangulov left as manager prior to the start of the 1953 season, but his influence over Spartak's style remained. Furthermore, with the dissolution of TsSKA, Spartak gained experienced defender Anatoly Bashashkin to shore up their defense, which had been a weakness in previous years. Altogether, Spartak's 1953 roster boasted an excellent balance of offense and defense, creativity and discipline, and youth and experience. After starting the season slowly, Spartak went on an unbeaten streak of high-scoring, exciting games. Spartak defeat Vilnius 7-0, led by Simonian, described as the "initiator and leader...skillfully distributing the ball between his partners, but at any moment, attacking sharply by himself."⁷¹ Two games later, Spartak soundly defeated third-place Zenit Leningrad; though he did not score, Simonian facilitated the offense and assisted on two of the goals.⁷² Later that month, Spartak defeated second-place Dinamo Tbilisi; this time Netto orchestrated the attack, playing a brilliant pass to set up an opening goal for winger Anatolii Il'in. Spartak capitalized on the momentum and scored another goal within the next four minutes.⁷³ Spartak's aggression proved effective, defeating Dinamo Tbilisi 4-1 and impressing reporters with their style. "Spartak's attackers displayed a purposeful game and kept Dinamo's goal under threat," commented a journalist, "That's how they must play."⁷⁴ The victory over Dinamo Tbilisi proved to be much needed, as by the end of the season, only a few points separated them from Spartak in first place. In the last week of the season,

⁷¹ "S krupnym schyotom," *Sovetskii Sport*, 5.28.1953.

⁷² A. Kalinin, "Vesti ataki shirokim frontom." *Sovetskii Sport*, 6.11.1953.

⁷³ P. Kaminskiy, "Smelee i chashche bit' po vorotam!" *Sovetskii Sport*, 6.27.1953.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Dinamo Tbilisi had the opportunity to tie Spartak and force a playoff for the championship but lost to third-place Torpedo Moscow, ensuring Spartak's championship.⁷⁵

Spartak's electrifying 1953 campaign rejuvenated excitement and interest in soccer. Still, the season was not without incidents of undisciplined play and rude behavior. Yet, the perceived cause of such behavior began to shift. In the Spartak-Zenit match, a Zenit defender named Severov harshly fouled Spartak winger Boris Tatushin. The reporter commented that because he was "inferior in *speed and technique* [emphasis added] ... Severov turned to unlawful methods."⁷⁶ The journalist did not place blame for Severov's actions on weak ideology, but an inability to match Tatushin's athleticism and skill; ideological-political education is never mentioned. This change in perspective even reached Konstantin Andrianov, vice minister of sport in the Soviet Union. In an editorial addressing the current state of Soviet soccer, Andrianov emphasized the technical aspect of soccer, writing "We now have all the opportunities to seriously improve the class of our teams if we quickly eliminate the shortcoming in the training of our players."⁷⁷ This editorial was published only a few weeks after Spartak soundly defeated Dinamo Tbilisi, and Spartak's performance undoubtedly influenced Andrianov's opinion; he highlighted Spartak as a model for other Soviet clubs to emulate. "Spartak Moscow testifies to the note that serious, methodical, and correct training can improve the game," raved Andrianov, "Spartak players now display a confident, technical, sharp game."⁷⁸ Overall, the concept of ideological-political education did not end during 1953, but with less Party interference, coaches

⁷⁵ The Torpedo-Dinamo Tbilisi match ended in controversy. Referee Nikolai Latyshev, known to favor Moscow-based clubs, officiated the match and made several dubious calls. If the match was indeed fixed, the motivation was more so to keep Dinamo Tbilisi, home team of the not-yet-executed Beria, from winning the title rather than to ensure Spartak's title; any Russian team would have been favored over Dinamo Tbilisi. See Edelman, *Spartak Moscow*, 207-208.

⁷⁶ A. Kalinin, "Vesti ataki shirokim frontom." *Sovetskii Sport*, 6.11.1953.

⁷⁷ K. Andrianov, "Za vysokiy klass sovetskogo futbola," *Sovetskii Sport*, 7.16.1953.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

and reporters made more accurate assessments regarding player behavior. Soccer officials, journalists, and coaches recognized that better coaching and conditioning produced better disciplined players, not experts on Marxism-Leninism.

It was not only the skill and style that Spartak possessed, but the composition of the roster that captured the imagination of Soviet journalists and spectators. Spartak was a team of characters. Nikita Simonian and Igor Netto were the first non-Russian stars to lead a Moscow-based team. Many of the squad's other players, though ethnically Russian, differed from the classic image of Soviet masculinity. Not only was Simonian short, but the rest of Spartak's forwards were also diminutive: Aleksei Paramonov and Anatolii Il'in were 5'9", while Boris Tatushin was the smallest at only 5'6". Yet, their slight figures did not hinder their passing-based style. Spartak may have been smaller than other squads, but they were more agile, quicker, smarter, and better conditioned; they looked different and played different than their opponents.

Spartak's uniqueness extended off the field as well. Whereas other clubs' activities included, albeit forced, excursions to museums, factories, or operas, Spartak players did not prioritize ideological-political education. Instead, they enjoyed modern movies, music, and women. In an interview, Simonian described the environment of Spartak. "There was a pavilion at Taraskova [Spartak's training facility] with a dance floor and a jazz band played there. People came from Moscow to dance. Pretty girls came...For us, there was no control."⁷⁹ Spartak players had more personality than players on other clubs, or at least, their personality was more public. Simonian expanded on the culture of Spartak in his autobiography, writing "About Spartak players of my generation, one can say this: Personality. Everyone in sight. Everyone drawing attention. Everyone an individual."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Robert Edelman, "Spartak in the Golden Age of Soviet soccer," 231-232.

⁸⁰ Nikita Simonian, *Tol'ko li igra?* (Moscow: FAIR, 1998). 63.



Figure 1: Simonian (far left) and Netto (far right) lead Spartak onto the field (Source: zvezda-fc.ru)

In a year of dramatic change across the Soviet Union, Spartak's championship and popularity was an indicator of the transformation of Soviet society and culture. Five years earlier, TsSKA, a team of Russian, traditionally masculine, and indistinguishable soldiers had won the championship. In 1953, it was an ethnically diverse squad of small players with big personalities. Fans, especially the youth, were attracted to their style on and off the field.⁸¹ Perhaps fittingly, in the year of Stalin and Beria's death, Spartak, the team of the proletariat, triumphed over Dinamo, the team of the secret police. Essentially, Spartak was a symbol of change, of challenging and overcoming traditional organizations of authority, and of embracing individualism.

Lev Iashin and the Goalkeeper in Soviet Culture

Simonian, Netto, and the other Spartak players were not the only breakout stars of the 1953 season. Dinamo Moscow fielded a young roster that year as well. The key players of 1945 grew older, slower, and less skilled – including star goalkeeper Alexei Khomich who retired from Dinamo in 1952. Over the next years and a half, Dinamo struggled to find a consistent

⁸¹ Spartak players' previously mentioned affinity for jazz likely attracted youth fans as well. See Gleb Tsipursky, *Socialist Fun: Youth, Consumption, & State-Sponsored Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1945-1970* (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016).

goalkeeper, but finally settled on Iashin by midseason of 1953. With only a few games remaining in the 1953 season, Spartak (a point behind Dinamo Tbilisi at this time) played third-place Dinamo Moscow. As usual, Spartak's forwards attacked aggressively and put consistent pressure on Dinamo Moscow's defense, but most attacks resulted in "an excellent shot that was taken by the Dinamo goalkeeper Iashin."⁸² Ultimately, the game ended in a 1-1 draw, though Spartak dominated in ball possession and shots on goal. Iashin's performance salvaged a draw for Dinamo and essentially stole a victory away from Spartak. By the end of the season, Dinamo Moscow finished fourth, but only allowed 19 goals, the second least in the Soviet League. Iashin cemented himself as Dinamo's first choice goalkeeper, a role he would retain for the next seventeen years.

In contrast to Simonian and Netto, Iashin was a star that fit the traditional idea of a Soviet man. He was tall, muscular, and commanding. He typically wore an all-black kit while in goal, which only added to his imposing figure. Off the field, however, Iashin was soft-spoken (sometimes preferring not to speak at all, especially to the press) and modest. He was not an outsider establishing himself in Moscow but was born and raised in the capital city, working in factories as a child during World War Two. Lastly, Iashin gained popularity not only through his excellent play and masculine, Russian appearance, but also by playing the most respected position in Soviet soccer: Goalkeeper.

More so than in most other nations, the goalkeeper occupied a special place in Soviet sports culture. At first glance, the veneration of the goalkeeper might seem odd in the context of Soviet society. Inherently, the goalkeeper is different. He is the only one playing his position, he wears a different uniform than his teammates, and he even plays by a different set of rules. In

⁸² M. Suzhkov, "Vstrecha ravnykh," *Sovetskii Sport*, 8.29.1953.

Soviet society, the collective was of utmost importance, not individualism. Instead, the goalkeeper represented more than an opportunity to distinguish one's self from the collective. In the Soviet Union, the goalkeeper was responsible for and accountable to the rest of collective. Though he stood alone, the goalkeeper was the last line of defense. If the goalkeeper ignored his responsibility, then he jeopardized the work of the rest of the team. Conversely, even if the team failed, an extraordinary save could rescue the team from disaster. The concept of a single individual, standing alone against enemies, saving the collective appealed to many Soviets who also feared capitalist encirclement and ever-present enemies within society.

Admiration of the position began even before the Bolshevik Revolution though. In his memoir, Vladimir Nabokov recalls being "crazy about goalkeeping" as a young boy. "In Russia...the crack goalie is followed in the streets by entranced small boys... He is the long eagle, the man of mystery, the last defender." Nabokov even suggests that there a distinct Russian aspect to goalkeeper. While studying at Cambridge in England, he reflected "The [English] national dread of showing off" was "not conducive to the development of the goalie's eccentric art."⁸³ Nabokov was not the only literary icon to admire and play goalkeeper. Yuri Olesha played semi-professionally before a medical diagnosis prevented him from competing further. In *Envy*, Volodia Makarov is perhaps the heroic goalkeeper Olesha desired to be but could not become. As a youngster in the Soviet Union, Yevgenii Yevtushenko favored goalkeeper over other positions. On one occasion, against an older team infamous for cheating and roughness, Yevtushenko won the game by saving a penalty kick. "The captain of the Destroyers [the opposing team] spun the ball in his hands, slapped it on its dies, spat upon it and put it on the penalty spot. I got myself ready," recalled Yevtushenko, "I felt a sharp blow on my

⁸³ Jonathan Wilson, *The Outsider: A History of the Goalkeeper* (London: Orion Books, 2013), 46.

face, then another then a third. The fans of the Destroyers were shooting small stones at me from slingshots...I was half blind from the pain and could practically nothing...I don't know how it happened, but the ball ended up in my hands.”⁸⁴ Such an event seems dramatized, but possible. However, the end of the game, when Yevtushenko dribbles the ball from his own goal through the opposing team before scoring the winning goal, the story seems implausible. Regardless of the veracity of the story, it captures the romantic image of the goalkeeper: alone, outnumbered, with the odds stacked against him, yet finding a way to triumph.

This image of the goalkeeper was pervasive in the Soviet public beginning in the 1930s. If Yevtushenko did indeed embellish his story, he likely drew inspiration from the 1936 film *Goalkeeper*. Based on Lev Kassili's novel *The Goalkeeper's Republic*, the film follows young goalkeeper Anton Kandidov, a peasant boy discovered by a soccer scout while catching watermelons thrown from a cart. Kandidov eventually earns the starting goalkeeper position for an unnamed Russian squad. In the culmination of the film, Kandidov and his teammates host the sinister looking “Black Buffaloes,” whose uniforms bear Fascist symbolism. Kandidov makes save after save until, in the last minute of the match, he is forced to save a penalty shot. Not only does he save the penalty, Kandidov races down the pitch to score the winning goal before time expires. As fans rush onto the field and adorn Kandidov with flowers, the chorus drives home the political message of the film: “Hey, goalkeeper, prepare for the fight. You are a sentry in goal. Imagine there is a border behind you!”⁸⁵

The politicization of goalkeepers turned unfortunately real during World War Two. During 1942 in Nazi-occupied Kiev, the Germans organized a soccer tournament which included a local Ukrainian team. The Ukrainian squad trounced its axis opponents before finally defeating

⁸⁴ Yevgeniy Yevtushenko, “A Poet Against the Destroyers,” *Sports Illustrated*, 12.19.1966, 102.

⁸⁵ “Vratar,” *Youtube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQLDr7jVDwM>.

the German garrison team in the final. The Germans order a replay and were determined not to lose. In the rematch, the Ukrainians again raced out to a two-goal lead by halftime. No one is quite sure exactly what occurred at halftime, but myth suggests that the Ukrainian team was warned they would face severe punishment if they won again. It was Mykola Trusevych, the team's goalkeeper, who gave an inspiring speech encouraging his teammates to continue to fight for victory. In the end, the Ukrainian team prevailed again. The players were then sent to prison camps where by February of the following year, several of them, including Trusevych, were killed.⁸⁶ The legend surrounding what came to be known as the "Death Match" was likely untrue or at least highly embellished, but the public was enchanted by the tale, even years after the war ended.⁸⁷

In 1945, Dinamo Moscow goalkeeper Alexei Khomich finally gave Soviet soccer fans a tangible figure to rally around. As a member of the team that toured Britain in 1945, Khomich excited both Soviet and British fans with his athleticism and bravery. In the following years, Khomich's performance in the Soviet League cemented his status as the greatest Soviet goalkeeper. However, not long after Khomich retired from Dinamo, Iashin quickly challenged that distinction, leading Dinamo Moscow to the Soviet League title in 1954. Throughout the rest of the 1960s, Spartak and Dinamo Moscow battled each other for titles. From 1953 through 1963, either Dinamo Moscow or Spartak won the championship nine out of the eleven seasons; Dinamo winning five, Spartak four. The Dinamo-Spartak rivalry benefited not only from the superiority of the two clubs, but from their contrasting styles as well. Spartak maintained their offensive-minded approach while Dinamo relied on Iashin and a stingy defense. Amazingly, in championship winning years, Iashin averaged less than a goal per game allowed.

⁸⁶ Andy Dougan, *Dynamo: Defending the Honour of Kiev* (London: Fourth Estate, 2002).

⁸⁷ "Tretiy Taym," *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1awfyw9vIU>.

Iashin's success propelled him to the status of the Soviet Union's most popular soccer player. The Party decreasingly emphasized ideological-political education, but nevertheless, did not mind when players exemplified and promoted Soviet values themselves. Iashin refused to drink alcohol and, though he admitted to a smoking habit, acknowledged that it was unhealthy and a bad example to those who idolized him. When asked by a journalist if he would consider playing for Real Madrid if they paid him a salary of 100,00 (in which currency was unspecified), Iashin stoutly declined, replying "I would not hesitate to refuse, since I do not imagine myself to be anywhere other than Russia...I feel sorry for those soccer players, who because of money, are forced to play in foreign countries."⁸⁸ In one reply, Iashin displayed his commitment to both his country and Soviet values. Consequently, he was rewarded by the Party for his service through many award, including the Order of Lenin and the Order of the Red Banner of Labor. The most prestigious award of Iashin's career, however, did not come from the Party. The 1963 season was memorable for Iashin and all Soviet soccer fans. It was Iashin's best year of his career, starting twenty-seven matches and only allowing six goals; Such extraordinary goalkeeping propelled Dinamo to the championship. Even outside the Soviet Union, Iashin's performance caught the attention of sports journalists. In honor of his 1963 season, *France Football* award the Ballon d'Or (Golden Ball) to Lev Iashin as the best player in European Soccer. Naturally, the Soviet press was ecstatic. "The conclusion is unanimous," wrote the editor of *Futbol i Khokkei*, "The majority of soccer observers gave their votes to the representative of the Soviet goalkeeping school... Soviet soccer fans have long appreciated the work of the Dinamo goalkeeper. This prize is another testament of his class."⁸⁹ In a way, the award was not solely for Iashin; it was for

⁸⁸ "Lev Iashin," *Futbol i Khokkei*, 7.31.1960.

⁸⁹ "'Zolotoy Miach' Iashina." *Futbol i Khokkei*, 12.22.1963.

Soviet soccer as a whole, a justification for the Soviet method and a coronation for the superiority of the Soviet sportsmen.



Figure 2: Iashin on the cover of Futbol i Khokkei after receiving the Ballon D'or (Source :Futbol i Khokkei, 5.31.1964)

Eduard Streltsov: Victor and Villain

While Dinamo Moscow and Spartak fought for superiority in Soviet soccer, a third, lesser-known team was gathering interest from fans as well. Torpedo Moscow, though based in the capital, had traditionally been on the outside of the Soviet soccer elite. However, the club began to achieve success in the postwar period. Year after year, the club crept up the final standings. Similar to Spartak, Torpedo brought in many young players that did not fit the traditional image of a Soviet sportsman. Without a doubt, the most talented young player in the Torpedo team was Eduard Streltsov.

Streltsov debuted for Torpedo in 1954, but exploded in 1955, netting fifteen goals and leading the Soviet League scoring at the age of eighteen. That same year, he debuted for the national team. His first game was a friendly match against Sweden; Streltsov scored a hatrick within the first half. Ultimately, he scored seven goals in his first four games representing the

Soviet Union.⁹⁰ Such productivity made Streltsov an obvious inclusion for the Soviet team that travelled to Melbourne for the 1956 Olympics. The USSR won the gold medal with significant contributions from Streltsov.

Yet, the Soviet press did not praise and adore Streltsov as they did other players. In comparison with Iashin, Streltsov was the complete opposite. Iashin prevented goals; Streltsov scored them. Iashin was stoic, a family man, and abstained from alcohol; Streltsov was extroverted, a womanizer, and heavy drinker. His skill in dribbling and passing resembled that of Simonian or Netto, but Streltsov played more individually than his Spartak comparisons. The criticism of Streltsov peaked in 1957. Early in the season during a match against Spartak Minsk, Streltsov, who as a striker was frequently roughed up by opposing defenders, retaliated against one such opponent. Streltsov violently tackled a Spartak Minsk player with both feet, studs up, prompting the referee to eject Streltsov.

Torpedo won the match, coincidentally from a Streltsov goal scored twenty minutes before he was sent off, but the commentary of the game revolved around his foul and ejection. *Sovetskii Sport* quickly condemned the action, which was even more egregious due to Streltsov's status as a national team player. "Can this man... a regular player for the USSR, be the hero of the match? No!"⁹¹ The journalist went on to describe Streltsov as a "hooligan" and "bully," and the foul as an "outrageous act that spoiled the entire match."⁹² The incident even elicited a response from the editorial staff of *Sovetskii Sport*. "The last match showed that even the leading masters of [soccer] can behave unsportsmanlike on the field; they allow crude, hooligan antics," the article lamented, before ending with the proclamation, "It's time for them to finish!"⁹³

⁹⁰ "USSR National Team, 1956-1958," *Rec. Spots Soccer Statistics Foundation*, 2017, <http://www.rsssf.com>.

⁹¹ S. Levkov, "Eto ne geroi." *Sovetskii Sport*, 4.13.1957.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ "Ot redaktsii." *Sovetskii Sport*, 4.13.1957.

Soviet soccer fans added to the condemnation of Streltsov through letters written to the paper. Many degraded him as an example for Soviet youth and encouraged him to look for his own role models in Soviet soccer. “Although he scored the only goal,” wrote one fan, “he can hardly serve as an example for athletes... He is a bully who violated the norms of sportsmanship... We know many sportsmen who have won the respect and love of millions of fans... Streltsov should learn from their example.”⁹⁴ Even Torpedo Moscow fans joined the criticism. One such fan wrote, “We remain of the opinion that Streltsov is good, but appreciating the player, we cannot pass by the shameful act that happened... Let’s hope Streltsov realizes his guilt and never does something like that again.”⁹⁵ It was not simply his violent foul, however, that drew the ire of soccer enthusiasts. *Sovetskii Sport* judged his play too “theatrical.”⁹⁶ The Torpedo Moscow supporter blamed Streltsov’s foul on his “harmful self-assuredness, and the loss of a sense of responsibility.”⁹⁷ The worst aspect of the foul, resolved one fan, was the ejection, which left Streltsov’s team a man short for the rest of the match.⁹⁸ Ultimately, fans and reporters concluded that Streltsov acted selfishly, choosing a personal act of revenge over the well-being of his own team.

The animosity towards Streltsov was unprecedented. Many players, as already shown, received admonishment for undisciplined behavior, but never to the scale of Streltsov. Still, the season progressed, Streltsov continued to score, and Torpedo achieved a second-place finish, their highest at that time. In the offseason, Streltsov resumed training with the national team in preparation for next summer’s World Cup. However, disciplinary issues did not go away. In

⁹⁴ P. Khidzhakadze, “K chemy eto barstvo?” *Sovetskii Sport*, 4.18.1957.

⁹⁵ G. Lun’kov, “Mnenie bolet’shika.” *Sovetskii Sport*, 4.18.1957.

⁹⁶ S. Levkov, “Eto ne geroi.” *Sovetskii Sport*, 4.13.1957.

⁹⁷ G. Lun’kov, “Mnenie bolet’shika.” *Sovetskii Sport*, 4.18.1957.

⁹⁸ P. Khidzhakadze, “K chemy barstvo?” *Sovetskii Sport*, 4.18.1957.

January 1958, Streltsov was involved in a fight with police in the Moscow Metro and convicted of minor-hooliganism; he spent three days in jail before being released. The Soviet Soccer Federation revoked his position with the national team until he apologized for the scuffle.⁹⁹ The most peculiar and controversial event in Streltsov's life occurred in May of 1958. The day after attending a party with two other national squad teammates, a woman with whom Streltsov spent the night accused him of rape. He was arrested, then missed the 1958 World Cup while awaiting trial. Ultimately, Streltsov was convicted, banned from Soviet soccer for life, and sentenced to twelve years in a Siberian labor camp.

Theories about that night abound, some more conspiratorial than others. Streltsov did offer a confession, albeit under the interrogation of Soviet police, so it is possible he did commit the crime. Others posit that the conviction was further retaliation for his unsportsmanlike play and attitude. One theory suggests that Soviet authorities worried about Streltsov defecting during the World Cup in Sweden, while another theory postulates he offended the daughter of a Politburo member and was therefore a "marked man." Another cites Streltsov's refusal to transfer to Dinamo Moscow as the cause.¹⁰⁰ Whatever the truth behind Streltsov's case, his poor persona in the Soviet press did him no favors. His character and past actions allowed the public to at least imagine Streltsov committing the crime. Such behavior would never have been thought of as possible for Iashin, Simonian, or Netto.

Streltsov ended up serving only five years of his twelve-year sentence. He returned to Moscow in 1963 but did not immediately return to the field; his ban from soccer was still in effect. In 1964, after Khrushchev's removal from power, the Soviet Soccer Federation lifted his

⁹⁹ Wilson, *Soccer Behind the Iron Curtain*, 271.

¹⁰⁰ Simon Kuper, *Soccer against the Enemy: How the World's Most Popular Sport Stars and Fuels Revolutions and Keeps Dictators in Power* (New York: Nation Books, 2006), 45-46.

suspension. That year, he intermittently played with Torpedo, but only joined the club as a full-time player for the 1965 season. His impact was immediate. In contrast to the villainous portrayal of him from 1957, Streltsov was the story of the season in 1965. Valentin Ivanov, Streltsov's partner in attack, recalled Streltsov's return and noted that the camps hadn't changed him as a player: "It only made him bolder. He still had his health, and talent is talent. He was the best player in the USSR."¹⁰¹ Torpedo Moscow won the Soviet Championship, and Streltsov led the team with twelve goals. Despite Ivanov's declaration of Streltsov's supremacy, at the end of the year, his Torpedo teammate Valerii Voronin won Soviet Soccer Player of the Year; Streltsov finished second.¹⁰²

After the 1967 season, Streltsov won the award. Ironically, Torpedo only finished twelfth that season and Streltsov's performances were uninspiring. Still, that summer he rejoined the Soviet national team for several exhibition matches and played well. Perhaps the image of Streltsov donning the red jersey with "СССР" across the chest was too captivating to ignore, perhaps the award was an apology for his severe punishment, or possibly Streltsov's style of play appealed to the Soviet press. The time spent in labor camps likely almost certainly took a toll on Streltsov's body. Only in his late twenties at the time of his return, he looked thin, balding, and was slower than before. Instead of playing strictly as a striker, Streltsov occasionally dropped in the role of central midfielder where his diminished quickness was not as much of a weakness.

Journalists seemed to embrace this new role and emphasized his teamwork, vision, and passing ability just as much as his dribbling and shooting. While admitting Streltsov still possessed "some unusual flair," a reporter praised his teamwork: "He sees the field perfectly...He instantly notices a partner's opening, or rather, picks the opportunity for his

¹⁰¹ Wilson, *Soccer Behind the Iron Curtain*, 279.

¹⁰² "Luchshiy futbolist goda," *Futbol i Khokkei*, 1.1.1966.

partner to go to a free area and immediately sends the ball there.”¹⁰³ His new style displayed less aggression and more patience. “They say that Streltsov’s technique is not as intricate [as other players],” commented the same journalist, “That he cannot ‘untwist’ himself from defenders... he does not try. When there are defenders near him, he immediately pushes to a comfortable position for his teammates.”¹⁰⁴ Streltsov’s play finally fit the mold of a Soviet sportsman; he combined his excellent skill with restraint and unselfishness.

Streltsov won the award the following year too, though this time it was well-deserved; Torpedo Moscow finished third and Streltsov netted twenty-one goals, only one shy of the league leaders. Streltsov’s image increasingly softened and conformed to the expectations of Soviet officials. In the issue celebrating his second award, the headline photograph was not an action shot or even Streltsov in a soccer jersey, but him playing with his young son, showing Streltsov as a mature and modest Soviet player; similar images of Iashin with his family had been published in Soviet newspapers.¹⁰⁵ Streltsov authored an editorial (another signifier that he achieved the status of a proper Soviet sportsman) in which reflects on his career and offers advice, and criticism, to young players and fans. “I notice young players... sit and do not perceive anything,” criticized Streltsov, in a reversal of roles. “The young players refer to soccer as a tedious job; they come, run around without much thought, take a shower, get a haircut, tie their tie, and that’s it.”¹⁰⁶ Oddly enough, Streltsov never mentioned his rape conviction nor his time in labor camps. Perhaps the editor redacted those sections, or Streltsov decided not to write about it, but whatever the case, he did not include it as a defining part of his life in soccer.

¹⁰³ “V igre on kak trener,” *Futbol i Khokkei*, 12.31.1967.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ *Futbol i Khokkei*, 12.29.1968.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.



Figure 3: Steltsov with his son (Source: Futbol i Khokkei, 12.29.1968)



Figure 4: A similar photo of Lashin with his family (Source: Futbol i Khokkei, 1.1.1966)

Streltsov ended his career in 1970 as one of the most admired, but also controversial figures in Soviet sports, let alone soccer. What Streltsov's story reveals is the importance of conduct and public perception. Certainly, Streltsov was not the first sportsman to play aggressively and let his emotions get the best of him, but none were stars like Streltsov. He was also not the first to drink, womanize, or even have an extramarital affair, but his indiscretions were more public and shocking. Overall, his career and life were characterized by extremes: extreme talent and skill, along with extreme criticism and punishment.

Socialist Spectators

Of course, the goal of presenting soccer players as exemplary Soviet citizens was to influence spectators and fans to replicate their behavior. Soviet officials wanted soccer fans to

display the same Soviet values as players: Modesty, restraint, loyalty, and education. Just as Soviet officials desired soccer players to differentiate themselves from their Western counterparts through a discipline and collective style of play, so too did they want Soviet fans to distinguish themselves from Western spectators, namely with respect to hooliganism and violence. Throughout much of the world, soccer matches served as venues for protests, riots, fighting, and rudeness. In his memoir of soccer fandom in 1960s England, Nick Hornby recalls visiting a stadium for the first time as a young boy. It was not the players or the size of the stadium that impressed him, but the ferocity and anger of the fans. He remembers that “adults were allowed to shout the word ‘WANKER’ as loudly as they wanted with attracting any attention.” Overall, the environment of the stadium hostile and aggressive. “What impressed me the most was just how much most of the men around me *hated*, really *hated*, being there.”¹⁰⁷ This was this sort of environment that Soviet officials sought to prevent.

It is difficult to know if, on an individual level, fans emulated the ideological-political education of the players. On a mass scale, however, the results were mixed. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, match-day environments were chaotic, especially in Moscow. The Moscow Metro, according to *Sovetskii Sport*, “turned out to be helpless before the unstoppable avalanche of soccer lovers.”¹⁰⁸ Scalpers and hooligans routinely monopolized the availability of tickets. “You can’t even line up for tickets when they go on sale,” complained a young Dinamo Moscow fan, “Adults threatened to run us off.”¹⁰⁹ Often, Soviet police did nothing to stop the speculators and aggressive crowds.¹¹⁰ At times though, there was a notable difference between Soviet and Western fans. Many journalists reported fans showing respect and appreciation towards the

¹⁰⁷ Nick Hornby, *Fever Pitch* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1992), 19-20.

¹⁰⁸ Edeleman, *Serious Fun*, 100.

¹⁰⁹ “Zritel’ na stadione Dinamo,” *Sovetskii Sport*, 6.4.1946.

¹¹⁰ Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 101.

opposing team for a well-played match, even if the home team lost the game. However, such appreciation rarely occurred outside of Moscow. In the capital, fan loyalties depended less on geographic location and more on other influences. In provincial cities, fandom was not a choice; most cities only had one team. Therefore, the objectivity displayed in Moscow was not common in the rest of the Soviet Union.

In general, Soviet fans displayed the same passion and intensity as those in the West. “They are joyful to the depths of their souls with the victory of their team, and they suffer with each of its defeats,” a *Sovetskii Sport* editor described, “Everyone can see their joy and their pain.” However, it seems Soviet fans displayed the same hatred and anger Hornby experienced. “They are open in the expression of their feelings... Loving their team, they are harsh and demanding towards it.”¹¹¹ Overall, the emphasis on political-ideological education and discipline did not translate to the Soviet spectators.

Soviet officials succeeded in subduing acts of mass, organized violence. Whatever rudeness and fighting occurred in Soviet stadiums largely occurred as individual incidents, whereas organized supporters and gangs instigated riots in Western nations. The only notable mass act of violence occurred in the beginning of the 1954 season. Dinamo Tbilisi hosted Spartak Moscow to open the season. Fans of Dinamo Tbilisi, believing the previous season had been rigged to ensure they did not win the title, overcrowded the stadium and rioted. Twenty people perished, and the NKVD was forced to restore order. Despite the violence, the match continued, Dinamo Tbilisi won 2-1, and the match report contained no mention of rioting.¹¹² The absence of organized violence may appear to be a victory for ideological-political education, but

¹¹¹ “Ot Redaktsii,” *Sovetskii Sport*, 5.4.1952.

¹¹² Edelman, *Spartak Moscow*, 208. Also see Axel Vartanian “Secret Archive: Khodynka v Tbilisi” *SportExpress*, http://www.sport-express.ru/newspaper/2010-03-26/8_1/.

in fact, it was more the result of a Soviet laws combating hooliganism. Beginning in 1956, Khrushchev increased the scope of hooliganism laws to target petty hooliganism.¹¹³ As illustrated by Western soccer hooligans, such supporter groups rarely limit their violence to stadiums, but fight in pubs, train stations, and in the street as well. By targeting the minor forms of hooliganism, Soviet authorities were able to keep hooligans from organizing and rioting on a mass scale.

A characteristic common in soccer fans throughout the world is loyalty. Soviet officials especially emphasized this aspect of fandom. Soviet soccer players, especially star players, rarely transferred teams. Furthermore, Soviet players did not accept, nor even entertain, offers to play for clubs outside the Soviet Union. Likewise, fans did not abandon their favorite teams and though scores from foreign leagues were included in *Sovetskii Sport* and *Futbol i Khokkei*, they were resigned to the back pages while the Soviet League dominated the issue. In a way, loyalty to a local club was analogous to loyalty to the nation. Thus, soccer fandom was a microcosm of patriotism.

Soccer loyalty in the Soviet Union was more complicated and nuanced than in many Western countries, though. Soviet clubs were not privately owned, but operated by government sponsored organizations, TsSKA by the military, Dinamo clubs around the USSR by the NKVD, and Torpedo by the ZIL automotive factory. Spartak Moscow stood out among most clubs due to their sponsorship by trade unions, took on the moniker of “The People’s Team,” and quickly became the most popular team in the Soviet Union. In a way, allegiance to Spartak became a form of resistance against the Soviet state. Similar to Hornby’s observation that English fans could yell expletives without repercussions, Spartak fans could shout “kill the cops” or “kill the

¹¹³ Brian LaPierre, “Making Hooliganism on a mass scale: The Campaign against Petty Hooliganism in the Soviet Union, 1956-1964,” *Cahiers du Monde Russe* Vol.47, No 1, 2006, 352.

soldiers” when Spartak played Dinamo or TsSKA.¹¹⁴ Outside of Moscow, soccer fans did not have much option to choose their favorite team. In Rostov, Kuybyshev, or Tashkent, for example, only one team existed. Circumstances forced fans to follow their local team, no matter their opinion of the team’s sponsor.

The Impact of Television

Beginning in the mid-1950s, the popularity of television expanded the Soviet soccer fan’s world dramatically. Televised soccer matches were another medium through which Soviet authorities could promulgate the image of the soccer players as the ideal Soviet man, especially regarding physical masculinity which was difficult to convey through newspapers and radio. Live games or soccer coverage usually occupied prime timeslots in the Soviet programming schedule. In her history of Soviet media, historian Kristin Roth-Ey comments “Sports, however entertaining for the viewer, still held out the opportunity for educational and ideological work in a Soviet context...Sports on Soviet TV had no less place as educational programming than did *Verses of Italian, German, and Spanish Poets* [the program which followed a soccer match].”¹¹⁵ However, while television allowed Soviet values to reach a wider audience, television also undermined the goals of promoting sportsmanship and loyalty. Before televised matches, fans were reliant on radio commentators and journalists for information; the reporter controlled what details reached fans. Therefore, fouls or fan behavior could be either embellished or ignored to create a narrative suitable for Soviet officials. Televised soccer, often broadcast live, removed that control and viewers could interpret events as they happened.

¹¹⁴ Robert Edelman, “A Small Way of Saying ‘No’: Moscow Working Men, Spartak Soccer, and the Communist Party, 1900-1945,” *The American Historical Review* Vol. 107, No.5, 1457.

¹¹⁵ Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire That Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 248.

Additionally, television exposed fans in the periphery to the same information and entertainment as fans in Moscow. Therefore, provincial fans now had the same choice to support a club not solely based on geographic proximity but based on their own interests and identity. Theoretically, fans in Tbilisi could now follow Zenit Leningrad, Shakhtar Stalino, or Dinamo Minsk with the same enthusiasm as Dinamo Tbilisi. It might be thought that the fan culture in Moscow would replicate throughout the country and Spartak's popularity would only increase. However, fans from around the Soviet Union gravitated to another club, Dinamo Kiev. To many citizens, any Moscow-based team, including Spartak, represented Soviet authority. By the early 1960s, Dinamo Kiev was the best non-Moscow club in the nation, winning the Soviet League title in 1961 and then again in 1966. When Dinamo Kiev successfully claimed the title in 1966, fans letters congratulating them for their victory arrived from Kiev, but also Estonia, Leningrad, and Baku. Television had allowed these fans to create a transregional community with the Soviet Union. In his letter, a young Leningrad fan wrote, "In front of our television sets we applauded...together with thousands of your fans."¹¹⁶ By the mid-1960s, Moscow was no longer the soccer capital of the Soviet Union. Kiev, as well as cities in Southern Russia and the Caucasus, boasted better teams than those in Moscow. Soviet officials feared that if fans lost their loyalty and respect of Moscow regarding soccer, they could soon abandon their allegiance politically too.

Television not only introduced fans to new teams across the Soviet Union, but also exposed them to international teams like never before. Of course, Soviet fans were aware of famous players and clubs from back page reports in newspapers. When the Soviet national team engaged in international competition, fans marveled at the talents of players like Pele, Eusebio,

¹¹⁶ Manfred Zeller, "Our own internationale," 1966: Dynamo Kiev Fans between Local Identity and Transnational Imagination," *Kritika* Vol. 12, No. 1, 55.

and Just Fontaine. In 1965, Soviet clubs began competing in European competitions and Soviet fans experienced, if only through their television sets, the environments of Western soccer stadiums. Many fans were fascinated by Western soccer and its characteristics. Possibly wary of readers becoming fans of these foreign teams, these articles maintained a focus on Soviet teams and soccer culture.

When Torpedo Moscow played Inter Milan in the first round of the 1966 European Cup, *Sovetskii Sport* interviewed Inter coach Helenio Herrera. Based on the questions asked of him, it was clear the Soviet interviewer wanted Herrera, one of the most respected coaches in the soccer world, to compliment the Soviet Union and its soccer. “How has Moscow welcomed you?” and “What do you think of Central Lenin Stadium?” were just two questions asked of Herrera which had nothing to do with his team or the upcoming match. The interview ended awkwardly when the reporter asked if Herrera thought the USSR could win the next World Cup, to which Herrera curtly replied, “You need to ask them.”¹¹⁷ Soccer fans gained a general idea of international soccer through these reports but received a much more vivid impression by watching matches on TV. Foreign players had long hair, beards and goatees, jerseys manufactured by Adidas and Puma, and did not tuck in their jerseys. During this period, it was not uncommon for players to argue with coaches on the sideline or refuse to be substituted. This sharply contrasted with the short-haired, clean shaven, obedient Soviet players. Furthermore, when Soviet teams travelled to play abroad, fans saw advertisements alongside the pitch (for products unavailable in the Soviet Union) and rowdy soccer fans who were unafraid to resort to violence. In an interview with Soviet sport historian Robert Edelman, Nikolai Dolgoplov, a journalist for *Komsomol'skia*

¹¹⁷ “Ja videl Inter.” *Sovetskii Sport*, 9.25.1966.

Pravda and *Trud*, summed up his impression of watching international matches, remarking “We saw things we never had seen before in our lives.”¹¹⁸

Despite a general environment of rowdiness, Soviet fans never witnessed mass-scale rioting during the 1960s, but Soviet officials’ fears became reality during the 1972 season. Dinamo Moscow reached the final of Europe Cup Winner’s Cup. In the championship match, hosted in Barcelona’s Camp Nou Stadium, they faced Glasgow Rangers. It was the first time a Soviet club had reached a final since entering international tournaments and excitement was high; naturally, the match was show live on Soviet television. Excitement quickly subdued, however, as Rangers jumped out to a 3-0 lead just after the start of the second half. Still, Dinamo kept playing hard and mounted a comeback, scoring twice. With only minutes before the end of the match, Dinamo put intense pressure on Rangers’ defense and it seemed that a tying goal was imminent. With only a minute left, a Rangers midfielder fouled a Dinamo forward; the referee blew his whistle to indicate a free kick, but the thousands of Rangers fans who traveled from Glasgow thought the referee had ended the game. They rushed the field in enthusiastic, chaotic celebration. After several minutes, the crowd was cleared, but whatever momentum Dinamo had was lost. Rangers possessed the ball for the last few minutes and when the real end of the match was whistled, even more Rangers fans toppled the stadium’s fences and poured onto the pitch. The underequipped security force responded with force and a riot erupted between the Spanish police and thousands of Rangers fans.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Robert Edelman, “Playing Catch-up: Soviet Media and Soccer Hooliganism, 1965-1975” in *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World*, ed. Anne Gorsuch and Diane Koenker (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2013), 272.

¹¹⁹ “Dynamo Moscow Versus Rangers. European Cup Winners Cup Final 1972,” *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFe4qu1fiOs>.

Naturally, the Soviet press firmly condemned the fans' actions. The initial storming of the field, from a Soviet perspective, was a deliberate attempt to stall Dinamo's momentum. "After a long pause, when the field was cleared, the referee decided to play," reported *Futbol i Khokkei*, "but in a sporting sense, the fight was not there in the last three minutes."¹²⁰ The recently retired Lev Iashin commented that Dinamo "would have been successful if the fans had not run out onto the field."¹²¹ This unruly behavior was the natural culmination of unruly behavior from the Rangers supporters. The Soviet press highlighted the hostile behavior: "Throughout the match, [Rangers fans] threw seat cushions, bottles, and all sorts of objects onto the field. The outrage of the hooligans continued after the match; there were victims and there were arrests."¹²² Despite the harsh condemnation by the Soviet press (which was printed days after the event), those watching the match live were able to make their own assessment of the match and the foreign fans' behavior. The worst aspects of soccer hooliganism were broadcast directly into Soviet living rooms without a radio announcer or journalist to interpret the scenes for the Soviet audience.

In all, televised soccer was a double-edged sword, simultaneously promoting and undermining Soviet values. Soviet authorities used television as another avenue to promote sportsmanship, masculinity, and patriotism by promoting Soviet soccer stars and teams directly in homes. In contrast, Soviet fans received the ability to choose their own heroes, their own favorite teams, and make their own comparisons between Soviet and Western soccer.

¹²⁰ "Sryv matcha nashestviem s trubin," *Futbol i Khokkei*, 5.28.1972.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

Conclusion

Soccer's popularity exploded in the two and half decades following the end of World War Two. Its prewar popularity and the inherent simplicity of the game allowed soccer to come back in devastated regions quicker than other sports. The ubiquity of soccer meant it was an appropriate and effective medium to promote Soviet values of sportsmanship and masculinity to the public. However, controlling the image of the nation's most popular sport was difficult. Since the ideological-political education of players was connected to their performance on the field, Soviet officials, reporters, and fans had to criticize a team's educational efforts. This led to deemphasis in the importance of training. When the USSR national team disappointed in the 1952 Olympics, even the game's top stars and coaches fell under reproach; if the best Soviet players were not educated, then the competence of the entire Soviet Soccer Federation lost credibility.

Fortunately, the early 1950s saw the rise of a new generation of Soviet players. Many of these new stars did not fit the typical image of Soviet masculinity. Spartak Moscow embraced a style of prioritized quickness over strength and skill over size. Through Nikita Simonian and Igor Netto, Spartak's style led them to multiple championships throughout the 1950s. In addition to diverting from the tradition of typical masculine players, Spartak also rejected the connection between education and success on the field; the team could not completely abandon educational efforts but emphasized training and skill development which improved their technical style of soccer.

In contrast to Spartak's style, Dinamo Moscow found success through a defensive approach to the game. They contrasted their rivals further through the figure of Lev Iashin, whose position, appearance, and demeanor fit the tradition of a Soviet sportsman. Most of all, more than

his persona, Iashin's stellar performances for both club and country that established him as a Soviet star. Eduard Streltsov had the potential to equal or even surpass Iashin's stature. Like the Dinamo goalkeeper, he looked the part and excelled on the field. However, guilty of rape or not, his behavior on and off the pitch led to unpopularity with fans, expulsion from the Soviet League, and imprisonment in a labor camp. Upon his return to competition, Streltsov reinvented his image to that of an accepted Soviet athlete.

Soccer fans, whose behavior Soviet officials wanted to influence by presenting idealized Soviet sportsmen, were generally disciplined and loyal soccer fans. The world of a Soviet spectator was small (especially outside of Moscow), limited to what was printed in the newspapers, heard on the radio, or witnessed at a local game. When televised soccer was introduced, fans could now engage with soccer clubs throughout the nation and throughout Europe. This fractured the fans' loyalties and exposed them to a soccer culture alien to their own.

Soviet officials had ambitious goals to make Soviet soccer something different than soccer in the rest of the world; a sport that produced better citizens, not just better players. Nevertheless, the need to produce skilled players and be competitive in international competitions required changes to the traditional Soviet sportsmanship. From the late 1940s to the end of the 1960s, the average soccer star changed from a tall, muscular Russian athlete to a small, fast, and non-Russian. Fans' exposure to provincial and international teams and players only accelerated that transition. By the time traditional icons like Iashin and Streltsov retired, Soviet soccer looked radically different. Soviet soccer power had shifted away from Moscow and the next decade would be dominated by teams from Ukraine and the Caucasus, and the ethnicity of soccer stars reflected this change. In general, Soviet soccer culture gradually transformed to resemble leagues in Europe. After witnessing international hooligans riot and storm fields, a

young generation of Soviet fans created a new mode of fandom in the USSR. Players grew their hair long and wore jerseys made by Adidas. Such change was certainly dramatic, but ultimately improved the quality of Soviet soccer abroad and domestically.

Chapter 2: The X's and O's of Communism: The Development of a Soviet Style of Play

In July 1960, the Soviet national team was in Marseille preparing to face Czechoslovakia in the semifinals of the inaugural European Nations Cup. After an underwhelming performance in the 1958 World Cup, the USSR added young, promising players to reinvigorate and energize the team. The Soviet roster was talented, but unproven; only four players on the roster had played more than twenty matches representing the USSR. Furthermore, the team had not been tested in the tournament. The Soviet Union easily advanced to the penultimate round via a 4-1 aggregate victory over Hungary and the withdrawal of Spain from the tournament, which gifted the Soviet team a place in the final four. That easy path, however, ended in the next round; Czechoslovakia was a skilled team capable of winning the entire tournament. The Czech team was led by dynamic midfielder Josef Masopust, who would be the Ballon D'or in 1962 and lead his nation to a second-place finish at that year's World Cup.

The starting eleven that took the field for the Soviet Union was a mix of young talent and established stars. Viktor Ponedelnik, Mikhail Meshki, and Givi Chokheli (each only 23 years old) debuted for the national team alongside Lev Iashin, Igor Netto, and Valentin Ivanov. The result was a well-balanced squad that overwhelmed their Czechoslovakian opposition. The USSR largely controlled the ball and pace of the game from kick-off and pressured the opposing defense. In the 34th minute, the Soviets finally found the back of the net. Ponedelnik found space at the top of the penalty box, wrong-footed his defender, and as the Czech goalkeeper rushed out from his box, Ponedelnik effortlessly slid the ball to Ivanov for an easy tap-in.¹²³

¹²³ "Chekhoslovakiia 0-3 SSSR," *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVtKQa9ecWM>.

Eleven minutes into the second half, the Soviet scored again. Ivanov pressed down the right flank; Soviet midfielder Slava Metreveli expertly struck a pass that allowed Ivanov to get behind the defense and face the goalkeeper one-on-one. As the keeper dove for the ball, Ivanov quickly slid the ball underneath the goalkeeper's extended arms before calmly shooting into the wide-open goal.¹²⁴ Only ten minutes later, Soviet midfielder Valentin Babukin advanced the ball down the center of the pitch, Ponedelnik made an overlapping run on the left side, and Babukin lifted a perfectly weighted pass over the defense. Ponedelnik settled the pass before blasting an unstoppable shot passed the goalkeeper at close range to extend the Soviet lead to three goals.¹²⁵ With twenty-five minutes remaining and leading by three goals, the Soviets controlled the rest of the match and Czechoslovakia had not opportunity to mount a comeback.

The dominating win sent the Soviet Union to the final, where they defeated Yugoslavia 2-1 to secure the first European Nations Cup title. Though the championship match clearly carried more significance, the semifinal win proved to be the best display of Soviet soccer. During the game, the Soviet squad illustrated the core values of the Soviet style: Collective teamwork, fitness, and discipline. Against Czechoslovakia, the Soviet team moved the ball around the pitch quickly and efficiently. The eleven players performed as a single unit, often swapping positions to create overloads in different areas of the field; the first and third goals were scored via overlapping runs by Soviet forwards. Lastly, the Soviet players were better conditioned than their opponents and the difference was especially clear in the second half of the match as the Soviets outperformed the tiring Czech players.

The Soviet style was more than a tactical decision. Other styles of soccer than relied on individual athleticism and skill had also been effective in international competition, but Soviet

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

coaches and players chose to play the game in such a way that reflected their socialist society. This meant Soviet clubs valued teamwork over individualism and interchangeable positions over specialized roles. When effective, the Soviet style resulted in beautiful soccer and outstanding goals like those scored against Czechoslovakia. Yet, as foreign teams developed new and innovative tactics, Soviet coaches needed to evolve the Soviet style to remain competitive. The effort to maintain Soviet values while also winning matches and tournaments became a major theme during the Golden Age of Soviet Soccer.

Playing Catch-Up: A Tactical History of Soviet Soccer

Russia's first entrance into international competition occurred before the Bolshevik Revolution. In 1912, the Russian Empire sent a delegation of athletes to the Olympic Games in Stockholm, including a soccer team. The roster was comprised of fifteen players from various Saint Petersburg and Moscow clubs. By the luck of the draw, the team received a first-round bye, then faced Finland in the second round. Finland beat Russia 2-1 in a close match, but in Russia's consolation match, they lost to Germany by a score of 16-0, an Olympic record.¹²⁶ The embarrassment of the soccer team, combined with a lack of success in other sports, led the Russian press to label the 1912 Stockholm Olympics a "Sporting Tsushima," referring to Russia's military disaster in the Russo-Japanese war.¹²⁷

The eruption of World War One, followed by the Bolshevik Revolution and the Civil War, derailed organized soccer. In the early 1920s, the Soviets established leagues based on proximity, but a nationwide league did not exist until 1936. Furthermore, the Soviet Union did

¹²⁶James Riordan, "The Development of Football in Russia and the USSR: Part I." *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, 10 (1972), 69.

¹²⁷John D Windhausen, "National Identity and the Emergence of the Sports Movement in Late Imperial Russia." *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 16, No. 4-6, (1993): 874.

not join FIFA (Federation Internationale de Football Association), the sport's global governing organization. As a result, Soviet teams did not adhere to the standardized rules adopted by the rest of the world.

Additionally, Soviet teams were not aware of the changes occurring in global soccer. In 1912, the Russian players were simply outplayed by their opposition; by the mid-1920s, European teams had changed their style and formation while Soviet teams were largely playing in the same fashion as a decade earlier. From the earliest years of soccer, teams fielded two defenders, three midfielders, and five forwards (referred to as a 2-3-5). With the emphasis on attacking players, the common strategy was to play a kick-and-chase style, sending the ball upfield with hopes that one of the five forwards could gain possession and score. However, as the game evolved, and players became more skilled, passing and dribbling grew more important. Beginning in England in the early 1920s, a new formation emerged using three defenders, two defensive midfielders, two advanced midfielders, and three forwards; this shape became known as a W-M. The W-M allowed more passing options for midfielders, more defensive-minded players, and emphasized passing and ball possession.

Soviet teams did not adopt the W-M; few were likely even aware of the formation. However, since Soviet teams rarely engaged with foreign competition, their tactical backwardness was not exposed. The isolation of and confidence in Soviet soccer fell apart in 1937. In order to raise awareness and money for the Basque cause in the Spanish Civil War, a team of Basque all-stars toured the Soviet Union, playing several matches. Their roster featured players who featured for Spain's 1934 World Cup Team, and they employed the W-M. The Basques soundly defeated many of their Soviet challengers, recording seven wins, one draw, and

one loss, outscoring their opposition 32-17 in the process.¹²⁸ Their single loss was to a Spartak Moscow team which also featured several players from Dinamo Kiev. In addition to adding extra players, Spartak also matched the Basque's W-M and the extra defender stifled the foreigners' offense.¹²⁹ Spartak's success displayed the necessity and benefits of adapting to the style of the rest of Europe. Despite Spartak's victory, the Basque tour was a wake-up call for Soviet soccer officials. *Pravda* railed against the Soviet teams, writing "The performances of Basque Country in the USSR showed that our best teams are far from high quality."¹³⁰ Yet, in a rare move for Soviet journalism, the article provided a practical solution for the problem it presented: "It is clear that improving the quality of the Soviet teams depends on directly on matches against serious opponents."¹³¹ After 1937, the W-M was gradually adopted by Soviet teams, but the overall skill of Soviet players needed to improve to be competitive with the top European teams.

Dinamo Moscow's Tour of the United Kingdom, 1945

Dinamo Moscow's 1945 tour of the United Kingdom was the toughest test for a Soviet soccer team. In terms of soccer, both teams were completely unknown to each other. Few British fans, coaches, or players paid attention to the Soviet team. Likewise, though the Soviets knew which clubs they would face, which British players they would play was another matter. World War Two greatly disrupted the United Kingdom's soccer leagues. Many British soccer players fought in the war and in November 1945, some were still stationed abroad. Furthermore, players who remained in Great Britain often played for multiple clubs. Therefore, while Dinamo knew they would face Chelsea and Arsenal, it was not known which players those teams would be on

¹²⁸ "Basque Country Autonomous Team Matches," *RSSSF*, <http://www.rsssf.com/tables/b/bask-intres.html>.

¹²⁹ Wilson, *Inverting the Pyramid*, 79.

¹³⁰ "Sovetskie igroki dolzhny byt' nepobedimy," *Pravda*, 8.4.1937.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

the roster. Still, the Soviet players understood the style of their British opponents, regardless of the players of the field. British teams rarely played soccer that relied on team cooperation, short passing, and ball possession. Instead, English teams largely relied on the athleticism of individual players, valuing strength and speed over skill. During this era, nearly all defensive schemes relied on man-to-man marking. English teams certainly had skilled players, but often they played on the wing where they could beat their defender one-on-one and dribble into open space to either shoot or cross the ball towards goal.

Dinamo Moscow, on the other hand, played a completely different style of soccer. Dinamo's previous coach, Boris Arkadiev, had left the club before the 1945 season, but his influence was evident in their tactics. Arkadiev's goal as Dinamo's manager was "to breath the Russian soul into the English invention."¹³² He achieved success by instituting a strategy that allowed players freedom of movement on the field but kept an organized system. Players could swap positions, dribble, or make runs outside of their normal zone, and defensive players could attack when the opportunity presented itself. Yet, such freedom of movement was predicated on the idea that when a player vacated his traditional zone, other players rotated to cover the empty space. Therefore, while Arkadiev's formation always remained a W-M, the players occupying the positions were continually shifting. Many observers labelled Arkadiev's style "organized disorder."¹³³

Additionally, Arkadiev utilized a withdrawn center-forward. When opposing teams both used W-M formations, the three attackers matched up with the three opposing defenders. The center forward, instead of playing close to the central defender, retreated into the space between the defenders and the first set of midfielders. This positioning presented three options for the

¹³² Wilson, *Inverting the Pyramid*, 81.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

defense, each presenting its own problems. First, if the defense remained in place, the forward would not be pressured and have plenty of time and space to either take a shot at goal or find a passing option. Secondly, if the central defender did follow the forward, then there was space behind the defender where the outside forwards could make a run and receive a pass likely resulting in a shot on goal. Lastly, if the outside defenders pinched together to negate the space behind the central defender, this left the wing areas wide open for the outside forwards to cross the ball into the penalty box or dribble towards goal. The withdrawn center-forward forced the defense to react and created empty space in one of three areas of the field.

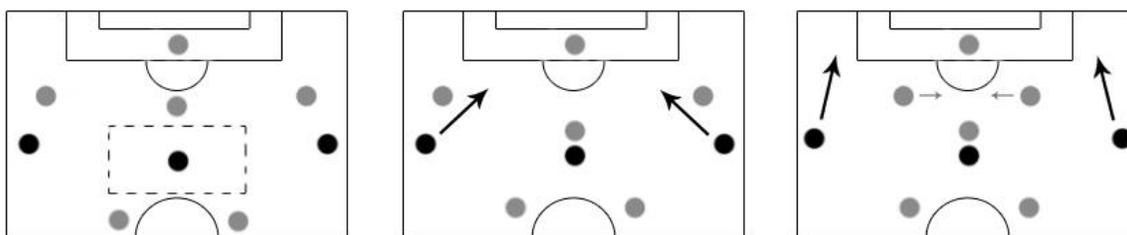


Diagram 1: The attacking options created via a withdrawn center-forward

The other key factor to Arkadiev’s tactics was ball possession. Instead of relying on long passes and using a player’s speed, strength, and athleticism to regain possession, Dinamo utilized shorter, safer passes to ensure ball retention. Additionally, when a player vacated his zone, he created an overload in given area, meaning there were more attacking than defensive players and passing was easier. Arkadiev’s system confused the defense through players switching positions, whereas the British system relied on the offensive player to outrun or outmuscle to opposition. When Arkadiev left Dinamo, Iakushin moved from player to manager, and continued the tactics of his old coach. After the team had played in Britain, the spectators dubbed the style “passovotchka.”¹³⁴ The games between Dinamo and the English were a competition between

¹³⁴ Wilson, *Inverting the Pyramid*, 82.

soccer ideologies; the individualistic, athletic, intimidating Britons versus the collective, skilled, intelligent Soviets.

Ultimately, Dinamo played four games. Their opponents were Chelsea, Cardiff, Arsenal, and Glasgow Rangers. Each team provided stiff competition, but Arsenal stood out as the toughest challenge for Dinamo. A victory against Arsenal, regardless of the other three results, would be a boost for Soviet soccer. Dinamo could not overlook their first opponent, though; Chelsea was led by center-forward Tommy Lawton, a prototypical British striker. He was strong, quick, and collected in front of goal. He had recently moved to Chelsea from Everton, where he had scored in roughly two of every three games; an efficient ratio in any era of soccer.

Chelsea's stadium overflowed with over 80,000 spectators struggling to watch the match, but Dinamo at least acted as if the fervor surrounding the game didn't affect them. When the whistle blew, Dinamo instantly imposed their quick, intelligent style of play. Throughout the early minutes of the game, Dinamo had more possession of the ball and created more scoring chances. The constant movement of the Dinamo players and the center-forward's withdrawn position confused both Chelsea and the spectators. An English reporter noted, "It was impossible to decide whether Kartsev [an attacking midfielder] or Beskov [the center-forward] was leading the attack."¹³⁵ Despite Dinamo's early dominance, Chelsea scored first on a mishandled shot from Soviet goalkeeper Alexey Khomich. Later in the half, a miscommunication between Khomich and a Dinamo defender resulted in a threatening situation. The defender rushed his clearance, the ball deflected off a Chelsea player and into the net beyond Khomich's outstretched arms. Soon after, the first half ended and, though Dinamo had controlled the game, they were down by two goals. Chelsea had the momentum as the second half began. Early on, a long shot

¹³⁵ David Downing, *Passovotchka: Moscow Dynamo in Britain, 1945* (London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999), 89.

from Lawton nearly added another goal, but hit the crossbar. Eventually, a Dinamo forward dribbled past two defenders and “drove home an almost unstoppable shot from 30 yards.”¹³⁶ Momentum had now swung towards Dinamo. Midway through the second half, Dinamo quickly took a free kick, delivering the ball into a dangerous position. Through “quick passing and clever positioning,” Dinamo forwards combined for a second goal for the Moscow club.¹³⁷ The game was tied, but not for long. Chelsea’s third goal came from Lawton outjumping the Dinamo defense to head home a goal. Yet, with only a few minutes remaining, Bobrov scored an equalizer from a deflected cross. The match ended in a 3-3 draw.

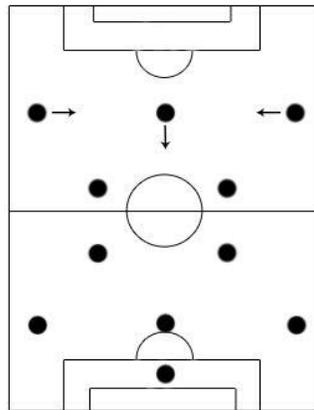


Diagram 2: Dinamo Moscow’s W-M, 1945

Though it had ended level, Dinamo were clearly the better team and their contrasting style of play drew praise from the press and players. The *London Times* complemented Dinamo’s “unquestioned ball control” and added “their counter-attacks were especially brilliant.”¹³⁸ Chelsea defender Albert Tennant remarked, “The Russians were on the move all the time. We could hardly keep up with them.”¹³⁹ A reporter for *Sporting Life* echoed these observations,

¹³⁶“Dynamo Draw with Chelsea” *London Times*, 11.14.1945.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Wilson, *Inverting the Pyramid*, 82.

writing “The way they found and used open spaces is positively uncanny.”¹⁴⁰ *News Chronicle* reported summed up the British admiration best, writing “If Dynamo had won by a handsome margin, they would have got no more than they deserved... It was not individually that the Russians shone, but in teamwork.”¹⁴¹ Following the Chelsea match, Dinamo played Welsh club Cardiff City, a much smaller and weaker squad than their previous opponents. Dinamo fielded an identical lineup as before and, like the Chelsea game, controlled the flow of the first half. The *London Times* wrote, “Cardiff could do nothing against a team who flashed weaved their way through.”¹⁴² This time, however, Dinamo converted their early scoring chances, leading 3-0 at halftime. The dominance of the Soviet only increased in the second half. At the final whistle, Dinamo won by a score of 10-1.

The third game of the tour was the most important, for both the Soviets and the British. After the impressive displays by Dinamo, the Arsenal manager had recruited a few players from other English clubs to play for Arsenal in the exhibition match. The most notable was winger Stanley Matthews of Stoke City, considered the best player in Britain. If Lawton symbolized the physical nature of British soccer, then Matthews was the talisman of individualism. He was often purposefully isolated and given space to beat defenders one-on-one. Former Arsenal player Alex James saw Matthews as the key to victory. “There is no individualist in [Dinamo’s] side such as a Matthews... This lack of an individualist is a great weakness.”¹⁴³ Iakushin’s view of the British winger was different, however. “His individual qualities are high, but we put collective football first and individual football second... The principle of collective play is the guiding one in Soviet football. A player must not only be good in general; he must be good for the particular

¹⁴⁰ Downing, *Passovotchka*, 101.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 100-101.

¹⁴² “Cardiff Outplayed by Dynamo” *London Times*, 11.19.1945.

¹⁴³ Wilson, *Inverting the Pyramid*, 84.

team.”¹⁴⁴ As against Chelsea, this game was competition between philosophies, both in terms of soccer and society.

The game was played in fog, thick even by London standards. The *London Times* remarked, “Exactly how all seven goals were scored was not clear. Any rapid movement on the further side of the ground was ghostly and obscure.”¹⁴⁵ The game was fast paced on both sides but turned aggressive near the end of the first half. The Arsenal goalkeeper received a head injury and the back-up replaced him to start the second half. The English players argued that Matthews was being subjected to shirt-pulling, elbowing, and other violations. Khomich was frequently roughed up even after making a save or securing the ball.¹⁴⁶ Despite the physicality of both sides, the game was full of goals and the final score favored Dinamo, 4-3. Reporters may have not been able to see much through the fog, by the Soviet style of play continued to make an impression. “What was clear was the Russian superiority in the collective ball-control – in other words passing,” remarked the *London Times*, “and their amazing speed in midfield when a sudden breakthrough was effected.”¹⁴⁷ Matthews had played exceptionally (scoring two of Arsenal’s three goals) but could not match Dinamo’s collective play. “Individually the Moscow side had no player of the football stature of Matthews,” reported the *London Times*, “But compared with their teamwork, that of Arsenal was painfully ragged and uncertain.”¹⁴⁸

Dinamo finished the tour with a game against Glasgow Rangers. As usual, Dinamo gained the early momentum and scored from a free kick after only two minutes. Twenty minutes later, they added a second goal in which “all the forwards had taken part in the movement.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ “Dynamo Beat Arsenal in the Fog” *London Times*, 11.22.1945.

¹⁴⁶ Downing, *Passovotchka*, 179-180.

¹⁴⁷ “Dynamo Beat Arsenal in the Fog” *London Times*, 11.22.1945.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ “Dynamo Draw in Glasgow” *London Times*, 11.29.1945.

Rangers got a goal back before halftime, and a late penalty for the Scottish team in the second half leveled the match at 2-2, which would be the final score. The “organized disorder” of Dinamo’s style made an impression on the Ranger players. One Glasgow defender later observed, “They interchanged positions to the extent of the outside-left running over to the right wing and vice versa. I have never seen football played like it.”¹⁵⁰

Entering the International Arena, 1946-1952

The tour of Britain was a tremendous success for Dinamo Moscow and Soviet soccer. Such dominating success against British teams elevated the status of Soviet soccer to an elite tier. Yet, more importantly, Dinamo showed the world that the Soviet style of soccer was equal to, if not superior than, the British method. *The Daily Mail* wrote that Dinamo played “a brand of football which in class, style, and effectiveness is way ahead of our own.”¹⁵¹ While the exhibitions games may have done little to fulfill its stated purpose of fostering friendship, it did establish the credibility of Soviet soccer. Dinamo set an example to future Soviet teams, both in terms of success and style. Their victories, as the Soviets saw, signaled the triumph not just of Soviet soccer, but Soviet society as well.

From 1946 through 1951, Soviet teams engaged with numerous foreign squads to continually prove their dominance. In 1946, the Soviet Union officially joined FIFA soccer’s global governing body. Soviet teams played several foreign clubs, winning most matches. Yet, like the competition Soviet teams faced in the 1920s and early 30s, none of their opponents were quality competition. Soviet teams defeated opponents they should beat; there were no upset victories like Dinamo recorded in England. Yet, Soviet observers were confident in their teams’

¹⁵⁰ Wilson, *Inverting the Pyramid*, 82.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

inherent talent. One Soviet sports writer concluded, “The many victories of Soviet teams in international competition demonstrated the advantages of our school over all others... Soviet football serves the people... Our methods of study and training have a marked advantage over methods used in capitalist countries.”¹⁵² Such a perspective of Soviet soccer, which was shared by the state, set unrealistic expectation for Soviet teams. With no allowance for failure, disappointment was inevitable.

The first post-war Olympics were held in 1948. The Soviet Union was absent from these Olympics, which pleased both sides of the Iron Curtain. In the West, concerns of preserving amateurism and sportsmanship prevented a full invitation for the Soviets. Though all Soviet athletes were officially amateurs, Western observers viewed them as professionals. From the Soviet viewpoint, the Olympics were a demonstration of bourgeoisie culture. Additionally, the Soviet Union would only enter the games if victory was certain, and the level of sport at the time did not guarantee success. After another four years though, the Soviet state decided that it benefited the USSR to join the Olympic movement. Victorious socialist athletes used the Olympics as a tool to prove socialist superiority. In 1951, the USSR formed a National Olympic Committee. The IOC included the USSR in the 1952 Helsinki Olympics.¹⁵³

Arkadiev coached the soccer team that traveled to Helsinki and it was largely comprised of players from his TsSKA club, though other stars such as Dinamo Moscow’s Konstantin Beskov and Spartak Moscow’s Igor Netto were also key players. Between 1945 and 1951, they had won five out of seven championships. TsSKA still played the W-M formation and employed similar tactics to that of Dinamo seven years earlier. Iakushin, now coaching Dinamo Tbilisi,

¹⁵² Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 95.

¹⁵³ Jenifer Parks, “Verbal Gymnastics: Sports, Bureaucracy, and the Soviet Union’s Entrance into the Olympic Games, 1946-1952,” In *East Plays West: Sport and the Cold War*, ED. Stephen Wagg and David L. Andrews (New York: Routledge, 2007).

joined the team as an assistant coach. This squad was the first national soccer team for the Soviet Union. Hopes were high for such a talented and experienced team; nothing less but a gold medal would be satisfactory.

The USSR faced Bulgaria in the opening round of the tournament. In the 90 minutes of regulation, neither team scored. Five minutes into extra-time, Bulgaria scored the first goal of the game. Unable to score for the first 95 minutes, the Soviets only had 25 left to score or face elimination. However, the fitness of Soviet players proved to be the deciding factor. Bobrov scored in the 100th minute. Only four minutes later, Soviet midfielder Trofimov added another and secure the win. The second-round match was against the much tougher Yugoslavia team. Since the cessation of relations between Stalin and Tito, a Soviet team had not played a Yugoslav squad since 1947. To further add to the mystery, no member of the Soviet soccer contingent had watched Yugoslavia's first round victory.¹⁵⁴ As in the first-round game, the Soviets struggled to score in the first half, but the Yugoslavs began the match well, dominating control and taking a 4-0 lead into halftime. Seven minutes into the second half, Bobrov scored the Soviet's opener, but the Yugoslavs answered quickly, making it 5-1. Yugoslavia retreated to a defensive formation to preserve the lead, but the strategy backfired and only invited pressure from the Soviet attack. Trofimov scored with fifteen minutes remaining, then Bobrov added two more goals. Finally, with only one minute left in regulation, the Soviets scored an equalizer. 30 minutes of extra time did not produce a winning goal, the match ended in a 5-5 tie, and the teams played a rematch two days later.

The replay had a different feel than the first competition. Bobrov scored only six minutes into the match to give the USSR an early lead. Yet, as the game progressed, the Soviets' fitness

¹⁵⁴ Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 104.

and stamina, a trademark of Soviet soccer, failed them. Yugoslavia scored three unanswered goals, knocking the Soviet Union out of the competition with no medal. The cause of the Olympic collapse was primarily the result of Arkadiev and Iakushin's mismanagement of players, not necessarily because of tactical errors. The 1952 squad was an aging one. Beskov was 31, Bobrov was 30 (and had already undergone a major knee surgery), and Trofimov was 33. The team had played three games over seven days with the first two going into extra-time. To make matters worse, Arkadiev and Iakushin had fielded a nearly identical team in both games against Yugoslavia. Naturally, the veteran players eventually lost their stamina and pace.

The loss was so unexpected and disgraceful, *Sovetskii Sport* did not print a column on the game.¹⁵⁵ The fallout for Soviet soccer and TsSKA was tremendous. Arkadiev, Iakushin, and numerous players lost their "Master of Sport" titles.¹⁵⁶ A few weeks after the Olympic debacle, the 1952 Soviet League started with limited and unenthusiastic coverage by the press. After several weeks, *Sovetskii Sport* finally published the league standings. TsSKA, the team from which the Olympic squad drew most of its players, was absent from the table.¹⁵⁷ The Soviet Soccer Federation disbanded the club and its players distributed to other teams. It was only after another two years, after Stalin's death, that the club was reinstated.¹⁵⁸

Gavriil Kachalin: Pragmatism on the Pitch, 1956-1960

Before the next Olympics, the national team needed to undergo a major restructuring. Only three players from the Helsinki squad – Igor Netto, Anatolii Il'in, and Anatoli Bashashkin – remained in 1956. The responsibility for winning fell on a young, upcoming generation of Soviet

¹⁵⁵ *Sovetskii Sport*, 7.26.1952.

¹⁵⁶ Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 105.

¹⁵⁷ "Tablitsa rezul'tatov," *Sovetskii Sport*, 9.9.1952.

¹⁵⁸ Edelman, "Stalin's Soccer Soldiers," 50.

athletes. Instead of TsSKA, many players came from Spartak Moscow. Hopes and expectations for victory rested on players such as Eduard Streltsov, Valentin Ivanov, Nikita Simonian, and Lev Iashin. Gavriil Kachalin took over coaching responsibilities. He was a former player for Dinamo Moscow during the tenure of Arkadiev and was even on the squad which suffered defeat to the Basque team in 1937. Kachalin's approach to soccer did not drastically differ from his predecessor's philosophy. Quick passing, movement away from the ball, and well-conditioned players remained the focus, but multi-skilled players and their ability to swap positions was the core of Kachalin's strategy. He required forwards to drop back in defense, expected midfielders to initiate attacks through the middle of the field, and even wanted goalkeepers to be involved in moving the ball around the pitch.¹⁵⁹ This approach suited the styles of Netto, Simonian, and Iashin. Despite the failure in the previous Olympics, it was not the Soviet soccer philosophy that was to blame, but the mismanagement and poor assembly of the team. Therefore, with a new manager and many new players, the expectation was still victory.

In the opening match of the tournament, the USSR defeated Germany two goals to one. The following match was against surprise qualifier Indonesia. They adopted an extremely defensive approach, packed eight players into the defensive zone, and did not record a single shot on goal; the games ended scoreless.¹⁶⁰ In the replay, the Soviets won 4-0, and once again the Indonesians played defensively, disrupting the Soviets' passing based style. "Closely linked movements proved ineffective with the final pass blocked or charged down," reported the *London Times*. "All four goals came either from dead ball movements or long-distance shots."¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Gavriil Kachalin, "K voprosam taktiki futbola," *Futbol segodnia i zavtra*, 1960, 93-99.

¹⁶⁰ "Indonesia Surprise Russia" *London Times*, 11.30.1956.

¹⁶¹ "Russia Prevails in Replay" *London Times*, 12.3.1956.

Bulgaria awaited in the semi-finals. Similar to the match four years prior, extra time was necessary after a scoreless 90 minutes. As if following the same script, Bulgaria scored first, but the USSR answered with a goal from Streltsov. Four minutes before the end of the match, Streltsov beat his defender down the touchline and crossed the ball in front of goal for an easy strike for the forward Tatushin.¹⁶² The comeback victory set up a rematch against rival Yugoslavia in the championship. The day of the final was rainy and the field became muddy, slowing the speed of play, and hindering the Soviets' passing style. The game was scoreless until three minutes into the second half when three Spartak players – Tatushin, Anatoly Isaev, and Anatolii Il'in – combined for a headed goal by the latter.¹⁶³ The single goal was sufficient and the Soviets won the gold medal. The victory had erased the embarrassment from four years ago. Kachalin's 1956 squad displayed the hallmarks of the Soviet style. Players weren't bound to specific positions and often created intricate passes to move the ball upfield and retain possession. No one forward became the focus of the attack; seven different players had scored. The players possessed better stamina and fitness than their opponents and typically controlled the games in the final minutes. The young players performed impressively. Iashin conceded only two goals in five games. Streltsov enthralled fans as well, displaying dribbling and passing skills on the wing; scoring twice and assisting the game winner against Bulgaria.

The new generation surpassed expectations, and only improved with time and experience. Now that the national team had been successful in an international tournament, it was time for the Soviet Union to test itself in the ultimate international competition: The World Cup. As reigning Olympic champions, the Soviet squad retained many of the same players from

¹⁶² "Football Match to Remember" *London Times*, 12.6.1956.

¹⁶³ Robert Edelman, *Spartak Moscow: A History of the People's Team in the Workers' State* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 229.

Melbourne. Lev Iashin was in goal, Igor Netto in midfield, and Anatolii Il'in, Valentin Ivanov and Nikita Simonian as forwards. Notably absent from the squad was rising star Eduard Streltsov. Only weeks before the World Cup, he had been arrested for rape. Though he was not sentenced until after the tournament, he still lost his place in the squad.¹⁶⁴ The loss of one player, however, did not dampen expectations for victory. After all, success was the result of collective, team play not individuals. The USSR opened the tournament against perennial power England. The Soviets opened the scoring early. Il'in dribbled into the penalty box, fired a shot on goal that the England goalkeeper should have caught. Instead, he merely deflected the ball to the side and Simonian was in position to score on the rebound. The Soviets' first ever World Cup goal was the result of a mishandled shot, but citing the teamwork before the goal, they saw it as the outcome of their collective style. Reflecting on the goal, Simonian stated, "The goal was the result of the team's effort. It was a team goal... I scored because my teammates created the opportunity for me. The goal was as much about them as it was about me scoring it."¹⁶⁵

The Soviets added a second goal after halftime. Defender Vladimir Kesarev dribbled through the center of midfield and played an accurate pass to Ivanov. The England goalkeeper charged the Soviet forward, but Ivanov beautifully dodged him and scored on the empty net.¹⁶⁶ However, England came roaring back. In the 66th minute, from a free kick, England lobbed a ball into the center of the penalty area. The ball bounced, untouched, near the penalty spot. Iashin initially charged as if he planned to punch the ball out of the box, but hesitated and retreated to the goal line. An England forward headed the ball into goal while Iashin was out of position.

¹⁶⁴ Wilson, *Behind the Curtain*, 264-279.

¹⁶⁵ "FIFA World Cup Moments: Nikita Simonian – Sweden 1958," *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6qs5npqGX8>.

¹⁶⁶ "England 2-2 USSR," *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-laWAHu6GQ>.

With five minutes left in regulation, the English earned a penalty kick. Iashin was unable to block it, and the game ended 2-2.¹⁶⁷

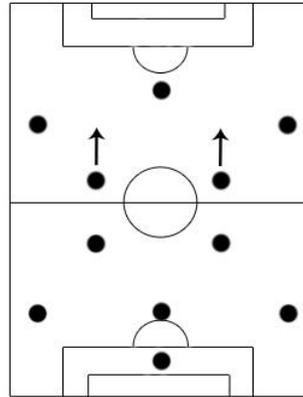


Diagram 3: Kachalin's W-M, 1956-1960

Against Austria in the second match, the Soviets began the game with their usual fast paced passing. *Sovetskii Sport* wrote, “Our players offered a quick tempo, especially when the attacks were conducted down the right wing.”¹⁶⁸ In the 15th minute on a cross from Ivanov. The momentum appeared to be in favor of the Soviets, but the Austrians had the opportunity to level the score on another penalty shot. Iashin, who was in excellent form all game, saved the shot and kept the shutout. Ultimately, the USSR secured a 2-0 victory after Ivanov added another goal, but as *Sovetskii Sport* reported, it was a “victory, earned with difficulty.”¹⁶⁹ The final match of the group stage against Brazil was the toughest test. Already a talented squad, Brazil added two more attacking stars, Pele and Garrincha, who missed the first two matches due to minor injuries. From the opening kickoff, Brazil immediately isolated Garrincha on the wing. A Soviet defender closed him down, Garrincha faked left, went

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ “SSSR – Avstriia, 2-0” *Sovetskii Sport*, 6.12.1958.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

right, and left the defender on the ground. He then cut inside and fired a shot that bounced off the post. In the next minute, Pele also had a clear shot denied by the post, and in the third minute Brazil finally scored. Renowned French journalist Gabriel Hanot remarked that it was the greatest three minutes of soccer ever played.¹⁷⁰ The game ended 2-0 in favor of Brazil, but it could have easily been more.

The loss forced the USSR to play a tiebreaker against England. Iashin played well and recorded another shutout while Voynov and Il'in recorded the only goal on a "lightning fast combination," typical of the Soviet style.¹⁷¹ The tiebreaker victory set up a quarterfinal match against host nation, Sweden. The squad was still fatigued from the extra match. Kachalin understood the challenge before the team; a victory against the host team in the capital city was not an easy result. Before the game, Kachalin advised his players that a slight victory was all he could expect from them. Then a member of the accompanying party delegation interrupted, reminded the team of Russia's victory over the Swedes at the Battle of Poltava, and ordered the team to destroy their opponents.¹⁷² An earlier rain had left the field muddy, hindering the Soviets' quick passing style. Instead, the Swedish team controlled possession, forcing the Soviets to utilize "rare, but fast counterattacks."¹⁷³ However, the Soviet attackers could not combine for a goal. With the support of the home crowd, Sweden scored twice in the second half, eliminating the Soviet Union.

In relative terms, a quarterfinal appearance in a first World Cup is a respectable achievement, but it was a disappointment for the Soviet Union. As in 1952, the coach accepted the blame. Kachalin stated that he had not trained the team hard enough leading up to the

¹⁷⁰ Wilson, *Inverting the Pyramid*, 119.

¹⁷¹ "SSSR – Anglia, 1-0." *Sovetskii Sport*, 6.18.1958.

¹⁷² Edelman, *Spartak Moscow*, 239.

¹⁷³ "Komanda shvetsii vyshla v poluginal" *Sovetskii Sport*, 6.20.1958.

tournament, and as a result, the sharpness of their skill and their endurance had suffered.¹⁷⁴ The 1958 World Cup was a missed opportunity for Soviet soccer, and not strictly of their own doing. The squad was without playmaking forward Eduard Streltsov, and Igor Netto, though included on the team, did not play the entire tournament due to an injury. Iashin picked up an injury in the opening match that hampered him throughout the tournament. Reflecting on the tournament years later, Andrei Starostin, who helped compiled the roster, wrote “Imagine what it would have been like with our national team in Stockholm if Iashin had led the defense, Netto our midfield and Streltsov our attack.”¹⁷⁵

Despite the dissatisfaction, Kachalin remained in charge of the national team. The national team made another tournament debut in the European Nations Cup, organized by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA). The 1960 UEFA European Nations Cup was the first installment of the tournament, and many prominent nations such as England, the Netherlands, and West Germany decided not to compete. The structure of each round was such that each team played home and away, with the winner determined by aggregate goals scored. The USSR advanced to the second qualifying round, drawn to play Spain. Alfredo di Stefano led the team and he had just won the UEFA Champions Cup (a European competition for domestic clubs) with Real Madrid. The matchup never occurred, though. The Spanish government declined to travel to the Soviet Union on political ground, thereby forfeiting both games and gifting the Soviets a spot in the semifinals.¹⁷⁶

The semifinal matches were single-elimination and hosted in France. The Soviets defeated Czechoslovakia 3-0, with goal by Ivanov and two by new forward Viktor Ponedelnik.

¹⁷⁴ Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 132.

¹⁷⁵ Edelman, *Spartak Moscow*, 239.

¹⁷⁶ The Spanish refusal to play the Soviet Union will be covered in Chapter 3.

In the championship match, they faced their political, and now soccer rival, Yugoslavia. Additionally, they contended with another obstacle that had hindered them before; a muddy, sloppy field. In the first half, neither team could gain much momentum. It was not until two minutes before the break that a Yugoslav forward beat Iashin to opening the scoring. Coming out of halftime, the Soviets responded by equalizing. The opposing keeper pushed away a powerful strike by midfielder Valentin Babukin, only to have Slava Metreveli dash in from the wing and tap in the rebound. Momentum oscillated for the rest of the match, but neither squad could find winning goal; Iashin was in excellent form. In extra time, he continued to be hero for the Soviets. An especially acrobat dive stopped the ball at the goal line, denying the Yugoslavs a sure winner. Sports newspaper *Futbol i Khokkei* highlighted this save as the moment of the match.¹⁷⁷ Seven minutes later, Ivanov received the ball on the wing and crossed into the penalty box. Ponedelnik elevated above the defense and headed the ball into the top corner.¹⁷⁸ The Soviet Union won the inaugural European Nations Cup.

Soviet commentators partly attributed the success to their superior tactics and style of play, “Our team played the game in the usual way,” wrote manager Kachalin. “[The team] carried out their defense and attacked with a wide front, using the flanks.”¹⁷⁹ But more than the tactics, it was the make-up of the Soviet players, what Arkadiev had earlier called the “high moral and physical character,” that brought victory. Kachalin wrote, “The team, from the first minutes through the second half were strong because of their solidarity, variety of technical and tactical skills, and physical preparation... It is the totality of these qualities that allowed the

¹⁷⁷ Gavriil Kachalin, “Atletizm, no i taktika,” *Futbol i Khokkei*, 7.17.1960.

¹⁷⁸ “Championship of Europe – 1960,” *YouTube*, https://my.mail.ru/list/black-angel_666/video/38/1371.html.

¹⁷⁹ Kachalin, “Atletizm, no i taktika” *Futbol i Khokkei*, 7.17.1960.

athletes in red shirts with the letters ‘USSR’ on their chest to win an honorable and deserved victory.”¹⁸⁰

Tactical Innovation Abroad and at Home, 1960-1962

The beginning of the 1960s marked a turning point for Soviet soccer. The championship had placed the USSR to the status of *the* elite team in Europe. Yet, it was also a period of tactical transition for both Soviet and global soccer tactics. In the 1958 World Cup, Brazil won the championship while playing an attractive and dominating style. Granted, their squad consisted of rising superstars and experienced veterans like Pele, Garrincha, Vava, and Didi, but they also displayed a new formation and tactical approach as well.

Brazil had moved away from the W-M formation. Instead they deployed a 4-2-4. It was not an entirely new formation: The Hungarian team of the early 50s had used a four-man defensive line, but it was how the Brazilians utilized the formation to emphasize their players’ abilities that made the difference. First, instead of man-to-man marking on defense, the defenders used zonal marking. This allowed Brazilian defenders more freedom to attack, especially along the sidelines. Secondly, similar to the withdrawn center forward utilized by Arkadiev in England, the Brazilians staggered the two midfielders and one of the forwards. This forced defenders to move out of position and provided multiple passing options in the midfield area. The Brazilian stars were masters of improvisation and individual talent. What the Brazilian 4-2-4 created was an efficient system that allowed for improvisation and attacking play, but did not leave the defense vulnerable.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Wilson, *Inverting the Pyramid*, 113-120.

At first glance, the Brazilian system might seem compatible with the Soviet style of play; both emphasized fast, attacking play. However, Brazil's style was actually mismatched with Soviet soccer philosophy. Essentially, Brazil divided their team in two an offensive group and defensive group which operated largely independent of each other. Kachalin recognized this limitations of the Brazilian system, writing "We are not against the 1-4-2-4...but we are against increasing the defenders through special, constant lines and using them only in defense."¹⁸² Secondly, when attacking, Brazil relied on the individual skill and creativity of their stars. This is not to say Brazil did not use quick passes to break down defenses, but they were willing to let their players isolate themselves on the wing and attack defenders one-on-one. Still, the success and popularity of Brazil and their new system forced Soviet coaches to adapt elements into the Soviet style of play.

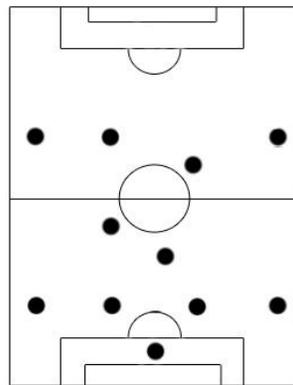


Diagram 4: The Brazilian 4-2-4

The other turning point in Soviet soccer occurred domestically. Since the inception of the Soviet top league, only three different clubs had won the championship: Dinamo Moscow, Spartak, and TsDKA. In 1960, Torpedo Moscow claimed the title. In 1961, Dinamo Kyiv finished in first place. Dinamo Moscow, Spartak, and TsDKA remained competitive clubs, but

¹⁸² Kachalin, "K voprosam taktiki futbola," *Futbol segodnia i zavtra*, 1960, 88.

their monopoly on Soviet soccer disappeared. One of the primary innovators in Soviet soccer was Torpedo coach Viktor Maslov. He coached them to the championship in 1960, and later won three titles at the helm of Dinamo Kyiv. Maslov was a mild-mannered coach, whose soft approach with players and sage-like knowledge of soccer earned him the nickname “Granddad.” Following the traditional Soviet school of soccer, he emphasized collective play. The tactical system was more important than any one player, no matter how talented. Maslov removed the Ukrainian winger Valeriy Lobanovskiy, who had starred for Dinamo Kyiv for seven seasons, after one year because his style did not match the tactics. Maslov’s approach to the collective even extended into the locker room. All members of the team engaged in tactical discussions and Maslov was willing to compromise and trust his players.¹⁸³

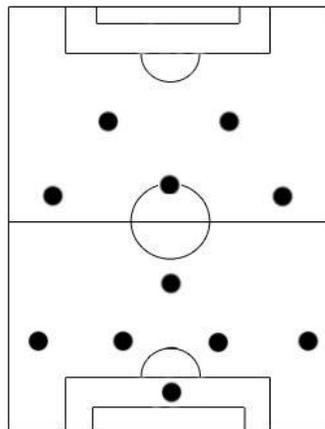


Diagram 5: Maslov's 4-4-2

Maslov had adopted a four-man defense like Brazil. However, Maslov was not fond of wing players, fearing they spent too much time dribbling instead of passing and moving the ball up the field. Speed was a key element of Maslov’s teams.¹⁸⁴ Therefore, instead of using a 4-2-4,

¹⁸³ Ibid, 148.

¹⁸⁴ An emphasis on speed had long been a key element of Soviet sports. For more on the Soviet fascination with speed, see Tim Harte, *Fast Forward: The Aesthetics and Ideology of Speed in Russian Avant-Garde Culture, 1910-1930* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).

he dropped both of his wings further back, thus creating a 4-4-2. “Football is like an aeroplane” he said, explaining his different formation. “As velocities increase, you have to make the head more streamlined.”¹⁸⁵ The two midfielders also staggered themselves, even to the point of one being directly in front of the other. In a way, Maslov’s formation could even be called a 4-1-3-2. Like Brazil, Maslov used zonal marking which allowed for defenders the ability to move forward and attack, knowing their teammates were covering their position.

A major rule in soccer is offsides, which prohibits an attacking player from being behind the last defender when the ball passed to said player. This excludes players from remaining near the goal and waiting for a long pass to create a scoring chance. Instead, a forward must begin in front of the defense when the ball is passed and then beat the defender to the ball; this play was known as a “through-pass.” Maslov used the offsides rule to compress to field of play. His defensive line moved as a unit and therefore negated opposing players caught behind the defenders in an offside position. In essence, he developed the tactic of “pressing,” which many coaches still use in modern soccer. The movement of the defensive line made the playing field smaller, allowing the midfielders to put more pressure on whomever possessed the ball. Maslov allowed the threat of a through-pass, but relied on his midfielders to apply enough pressure on the opposition that such a long pass was difficult to execute. Pressing inherently relied on collective play. If a defender did not stay level with the rest of the defensive line, an opposing player could easily remain onside. Similarly, if the midfielders did not adequately press the ball, a long pass was easier to play. Nearly all eleven players on the field had defensive responsibilities. By the end of 1960, the W-M was going extinct both in the Soviet Union and in the rest of the world. Kachalin clearly saw this tactical change coming. “It is not a mistake to

¹⁸⁵ Wilson, *Inverting the Pyramid*, 157.

say that last season [1959-1960] for the first time ever in the history of Russian football our teams played differently.”¹⁸⁶ The national team was already preparing for the 1962 World Cup in Chile. Kachalin needed to decide: Would he stick with the formation that had won the European championship or adopt the new 4-2-4 formation? And if he did adopt the new formation, how could he impose the principles of Soviet soccer onto the Western development? Kachalin liked by Maslov’s tactics at Torpedo, especially the way he kept collective play at the core of his strategy. “The success of the Torpedo Moscow was not an accident... They pleased fans of football and professionals with a smooth, strong game that characterizes them as a high-class team... This is a well-played ensemble, where each ‘violin’ sounds in unison with all the rest.”¹⁸⁷ Therefore, heading into the 1962 World Cup, Kachalin was now fielding at 4-2-4, adapting elements of Maslov’s Torpedo and the Brazilian national team. The defensive line did not push as high as Torpedo’s, but still compressed the field to apply defensive pressure. Unlike Maslov, however, Kachalin valued wing play. Thus, the outside wings did not drop back, but played almost even with the two center-forwards, similar to the Brazilian style. The two midfielders played staggered; Kachalin usually reassigned a traditional winger to the advanced midfield position to add extra speed in attack, while Igor Netto played deeper and acted as a pivot to move the ball around the field. Netto was the key player in this system, as it was his responsibility to distribute the ball and begin attacks.

The new role fit Netto’s style perfectly. Since 1956, Netto served as captain of the national team. Off the field, he was demanding and critical of his teammates. “Netto said everything to everyone eye-to-eye,” recalled Simonian, “although the captain’s character was not

¹⁸⁶ Gavriil Kachalin, “Taktika dolzhna byt’ gibkoy,” *Futbol i Khokkei*, 12.4.1960.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

pleasing to everyone, they understood he was fair.”¹⁸⁸ On the field, Netto was the engine of the team. His controlled the tempo of the game through short, accurate passes. “He did not risk long passes,” Simonian remembered, “His passes were short or medium. He played surely.”¹⁸⁹ In the new 4-2-4 formation, Netto played in the center of the pitch with passing options in every direction, allowing the Soviet team to move the ball across the pitch quickly and efficiently.

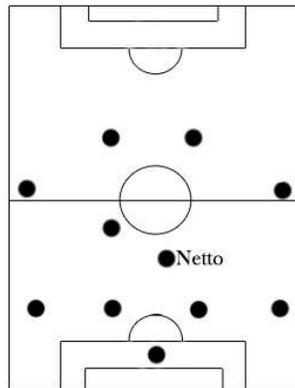


Diagram 6: Kachalin's 4-2-4 at the 1962 World Cup

Excitement and high expectations surrounded the Soviet team, as usual, but this time it was warranted. The USSR traveled to Chile as champions of Europe, and hoped they left as champions of the world. They played in a group with Yugoslavia, Uruguay, and Colombia; a tricky group, but one from which to Soviets should advance. All seemed well after the first game. They dispatched their traditional rival, Yugoslavia, 2-0. The next match was against Colombia, the weakest of the teams. It was a quick start for the USSR. By the 11th minute, they had jumped out to a 3-0 lead. Perhaps anticipating another easy victory, the Soviets let they guard down. Though they led 4-1 with less than 25 minutes remaining, the Colombians scored three unanswered goals to force a draw. French soccer magazine *L'Equipe* called it “one of the

¹⁸⁸ Simonian, *Tol'ko li igra?* 68-69.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 69.

greatest surprises of modern football.”¹⁹⁰ The tie now required the Soviets to defeat Uruguay to advance out of their group. In the 38th minute, the USSR opened to scoring, but the Uruguayans equalized soon after halftime. It was 1-1 until the 89th minute when Ivanov scored a dramatic winner to send the Soviets through to the quarterfinals. There, they’d meet Chile. The game was an oscillating battle early on. Backed by a strong crowd, Chile scored on a swerving free kick, but the Soviet forward Chislenko quickly leveled the score. Before either team could catch their breath, the Chileans scored from a long-distance strike that flew into the bottom corner of the goal.¹⁹¹ Chile was also playing a 4-2-4, but after gaining the lead, they dropped forward deeper to play a 4-3-3, stifling the USSR’s attack.¹⁹² The game ended 2-1 in favor of Chile.

The performance in 1962 was eerily similar to that of four years earlier. The Soviets had won their group stage, but lost in the quarterfinals to the host nation. It was another embarrassment at the World Cup. Much of the blame for the loss fell to Iashin. Out of any player, it was the goalkeeper who had the highest expectations placed on him. Also, given the individualistic nature of the position, it was easier to single out a mistake by the goalkeeper than another player. The Colombia match saw Iashin surrender four goals, the second of which the opposition scored directly from a corner kick. Chile scored their opening goal from 25 yards out, and even neutral reporters questioned Iashin’s handling of the shot. “For all [the kick’s] formidable power,” wrote an English reporter, “how such a long shot beat a goalkeeper as great as Yachine [sic] remains a mystery.”¹⁹³

While the Colombian corner kick was the example of Iashin’s bad play, it was not entirely his fault. The team’s defensive approach to the corner kick had Iashin position further

¹⁹⁰ Brian Glanville, *History of the Soccer World Cup* (New York: Collier Books, 1973), 160.

¹⁹¹ “WC 1962 Chile vs USSR 2-1,” *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BHHeRfwBUQ>.

¹⁹² Glanville, *World Cup*, 163.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

back on the goal-line while a defender stood at the near post; the strategy was the defender forced the kick to go over him and give Iashin or another defender the chance to clear the ball. However, the Colombian kick went low and directly to the near post. The defender had moved away from the goal and allowed the ball to sneak in between him and the post. After the goal, the defender was obviously aware of his blunder, hanging his head as Iashin berated him.¹⁹⁴ Against Chile, the initial goal was from a free kick inches outside the penalty box, but at a tight angle. While Iashin's positioning might have been better (the shot beat him on the near side), a Soviet defender was responsible for fouling the opponent and giving a free kick close to goal. The run-up to the second Chilean goal began from a careless giveaway by a Soviet midfielder. Then the defense afforded the goal scorer plenty of space to take a powerful shot.¹⁹⁵ Once again, Iashin's positioning could be questioned, but the goals should not have been entirely blamed on him. Ultimately, the 1962 World Cup showed that if success comes from collective play, then failures also should rest on the entire team.

Konstantin Beskov and the 1964 European Nations Cup

Kachalin was the longest tenured and most successful coach of the national team, yet the Soviet Football Federation decided to remove him as manager. The tone of Soviet soccer was beginning to shift. The emphasis on collective teamwork did not vanish, but the USSR realized the need for individually skilled players that could take "risk and responsibility" on themselves in critical games.¹⁹⁶ In his place, the union installed Konstantin Beskov, the former Dinamo player who led their attack in England. Since he retired from playing in 1954, he had brief stints

¹⁹⁴ "WC 1962 USSR vs Colombia 4-4," *YouTube*, http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x5c3ufk_wc-1962-ussr-vs-colombia-4-4-03-06-1962.

¹⁹⁵ "WC 1962 Chile vs USSR 2-1," *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BHHeRfwBUQ>

¹⁹⁶ Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 133.

as coach of Torpedo Moscow and TsDKA. As one might expect, because of Beskov's past playing experience as a striker, he tactics emphasized attacking soccer. "I'm a supporter of the attacking school of football," he wrote while coaching TsDKA. "Football consists of beautiful attacks and beautiful defenses."¹⁹⁷

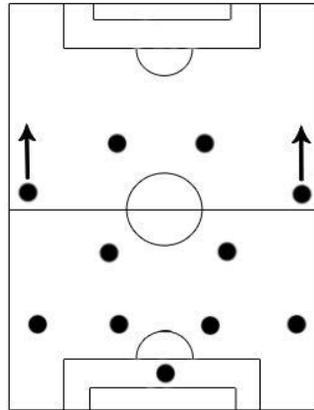


Diagram 7: Beskov's 4-2-4 at 1964 European Nations Cup

Looking to add the individualist flair that the Soviet Union was presumably lacking, Beskov's squad was more directly based on Brazilian tactics. He had used a 4-2-4 formation, but encouraged the wings to advance quickly and find space to use their individual skill. He strived for a system that retained the passing, collective style of past Soviet teams, but allowed moments of individual talent to be the catalyst for attacks. "[Tactics] determine the content of the game, which consists of numerous co-operations, maneuvers, feints, and precise transfers."¹⁹⁸ Commenting on the USSR's success in qualifying matches, a Soviet journalist commented on Beskov's style of play. "If Beskov did not blindly copy the Brazilian system, it only shows that he correctly understood it and uses its principles."¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Konstantin Beskov "Budem atakovat!" *Futbol i Khokkei*, 2.5.1961.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Vladimir Kirillyuk, "Treneri ego printsipy" *Futbol i Khokkei*, 1.5.1964.

Spain hosted the finals of the European Nations Cup. In the semi-final match, the Soviets comfortably dispatched Denmark 3-0 with goals by Ivanov, Ponedelnik and new midfielder Valeriy Voronin. In the championship, the USSR faced host nation Spain. Since they were hosting, Spain had to play against the Soviets; forfeiting a championship match in a home stadium would have been the pinnacle of humiliation. Midfielder Luis Suarez led the Spanish squad; he had won the UEFA Champions Cup with Inter Milan earlier that year. With Francisco Franco in attendance, the Spaniards controlled the ball early. They played long passes into dangerous area, forcing Iashin to come out of goal and clear the ball. In the 6th minute, Suarez won possession in the Soviets' half. He darted down the right flank and crossed the ball. Soviet defender Viktor Shustikov mistimed his leap and the ball fell to a Spanish attacker who easily scored against a helpless Iashin. The Soviets responded quickly, however. Iashin collected the ball in the penalty area, then threw and outlet pass to an outside defender who had moved up the left side of the field. Soviet winger Galimzian Khusainov then split the Spanish defense with a precise run and the defender delivered an accurate long pass, setting up Khusainov for an easy equalizer. The game remained 1-1 for the majority of the game. Occasionally, the USSR mounted an attack down the wings, but Suarez and the Spanish midfield controlled possession for most of the game. Extra-time seemed imminent, but with only six minutes remaining, the Spanish squad scored on an improbable diving header. Once again, Shustikov failed to clear a Spanish pass into the penalty area. This provided space for the opponent to dive forward and

head the ball pass a surprised Iashin. The Soviets furiously attacked in the final five minutes, but could not level the score.²⁰⁰

On a tactical level, the loss to Spain was not an embarrassment. The key factor was the midfield. Spain still used a W-M formation, and deployed four midfielders compared to the two midfielders in the Soviet formation. Both Soviet midfielders were talented, but young and inexperienced. Containing Suarez and the three other Spanish midfielders was too much to ask. However, on a political level, a defeat to fascist Spain was a catastrophe. If soccer players and their quality of play were representative of the society and culture from which they emerged, then the championship had proven that fascism was superior to socialism. Such a result was unacceptable. Despite a successful tenure, the Soviet Football Federation relieved Beskov as manager after only 18 months.

Nikolai Morozov and “Catenaccio”

Nikolai Morozov took charge of the national team. He, like many other Soviet managers, bounced from team to team and most recently had coached Torpedo Moscow in the 1963 campaign. He too employed a 4-2-4 formation, but the tactics and style of play he implemented were different than that of Beskov and the Brazilian team. Instead, he modeled his strategy on Argentine coach Helenio Herrera, coach of Inter Milan who had won the UEFA European Cup in 1964 and 1965. Herrera’s system was a much more defensive approach. He nicknamed the style *Catenaccio*, named for the bolt on a door lock. Its main feature was using a defender to drop behind the defensive line to act as a sweeper, roaming in front of the goalkeeper to intercept any long passes. Additionally, Herrera had the wings drop in defensive support and relied on a

²⁰⁰ “1964 Espana URRS,” *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWDAfLCqV_4.

central midfielder to create counter attacks. For Morozov, central defender Albert Shesternyov acted as the sweeper and Voronin initiated the attack. The Soviets played in a group with surprise qualifier North Korea, Chile, and Italy. In the group stage, Morozov's defensive style prospered, and the attack was efficient. In three games, the Soviets outscored their opponents 6-1. The quarterfinal match, where previous national teams had faltered, saw the USSR play Hungary, who had eliminated defending champions Brazil in their group match. Only five minutes in, the Hungarian keeper fumbled a weak shot and Igor Chislenko tapped home the opening goal for the Soviets. USSR forward Valeriya Porkuian added another in the first minute of the second half to extended the lead. Hungary added a goal of their own on a quick counter attack, but the Soviets controlled the game and secured a 2-1 victory, advancing to the semifinals.²⁰¹ Advancing beyond the quarterfinals was a milestone for the national team and a vindication of the new, tactical approach of Soviet soccer. "The fact that our players achieved success precisely at a time when tactics are changing," wrote *Sovetskii Sport*, "means that our football is on a progressive path."²⁰²

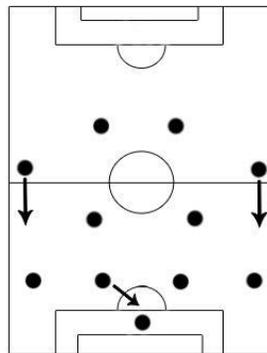


Diagram 8: Morozov's "Catenaccio" 4-2-4

²⁰¹ "USSR vs Hungary," *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rf2k7pOyaMU>

²⁰² "Trudnyi rubezh preodolen," *Sovetskii Sport*, 7.24.1966.

West Germany awaited in the semifinal. It was a match defined by sloppy and aggressive play. Early in the game, midfielder Iozhef Sabo injured himself attempting a tackle and Igor Chislenko earned a red card, causing his ejection from the game.²⁰³ With the USSR down a man, the Germans ultimately wore down Morozov's defense, inflicting a 2-1 defeat on the Soviets. In the consolation game, the Soviets faced Portugal and star forward Eusebio. After a handball in the penalty area called against the Soviets, Eusebio struck an unstoppable penalty kick. The USSR equalized just before halftime, but with only one minute remaining in regulation, the Portuguese found a winning goal even though the Soviets had controlled possession most of the half.²⁰⁴ Though they had lost their last two games, the USSR placed fourth, its best World Cup result. "Undoubtedly, this should be considered a success," wrote *Futbol i Khokkei*, summing up the result.²⁰⁵

Conclusion

A fourth-place finish at the 1966 World Cup was the pinnacle of national team success. After the tournament, the national team slowly lost its prestige until slipping into obscurity for most of the 1970s and '80s. The generation that was the source of much of the success in the 1950s and '60s – Igor Netto, Valentin Ivanov, Viktor Ponedelnik, Lev Iashin – had retired from international soccer. The Soviet Football Federation unexpectedly removed Nikolai Morozov as manager and a string of briefly tenured coaches followed. Mikhail Iakushin led the team to the 1968 European Nations cup, finishing fourth after an embarrassing loss to England. Kachalin returned to coach in the 1970 World Cup, but the national team resumed the practice of only

²⁰³ "FGR vs USSR" *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phhdRc0hxi4&t=130s>

²⁰⁴ "USSR vs Portugal," *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nk-49DEg7tE>

²⁰⁵ Andrei Starostin, "Chertvertaia vysota," *Futbol i Khokkei*, 8.5.1966.

reaching the quarterfinal before faltering. The last gasp of the national team was an improbable run in the 1972 European Nations cup when the new generation of players reached the finals before losing 3-0 to a West Germany squad that would win the World Cup two years later. After 1972, the USSR failed to qualify for three consecutive European Nations Cups and two straight World Cups.

The legacy of the Soviet national teams of the 1950s and 1960s is mixed. Many nations would be envious of an Olympic gold medal, a European Nations Cup championship, and multiple appearances in the knock-out stage of the World Cup. However, for the Soviet Union, inconsistent results were not acceptable, especially compared to the success of Soviet athletes in the Olympic games and ice hockey. The Soviet state expected soccer to achieve the same results as these other sports. What was the reason behind the inconsistent results of Soviet soccer?

The most apparent reason for the disparity in results between Soviet sports is the level of competition faced. In ice hockey, for example, the USSR's main competitors were only Canada, Scandinavia, and Eastern European nations. In soccer, however, the Soviet Union had to compete with all of Europe, Latin America, and even Asian countries. Additionally, in large part, Soviet ice hockey teams and Olympians competed against other officially amateur athletes. The World Cup and European Nations Cup are open to professional soccer players, and therefore Soviet players did not possess the same advantage.

From the perspective of the Soviet press, the failures of the national team could always be attributed to individuals or single events that cost the team victory. In 1952, Arkadiev overworked the veteran players, and in 1958 Kachalin had not trained the team enough. In 1962, it was Iashin's goalkeeping mistakes that eliminated the team. Beskov's loss to fascist Spain, whatever the reason, was intolerable and required his removal. What was rarely at fault, if ever,

was the tactics employed by the team. The Soviet style of soccer, which proved itself superior by Dinamo's 1945 tour of England, had evolved throughout the 1950s and 1960s, but its core principles remained: Frequent passing, lack of individualism, involvement of entire team in offense or defense, and superior fitness.

These principles, more than any one person, were responsible for the championships in 1956 and 1960. However, the Soviet style had to adapt to changes in global soccer. No more were Soviet tactics to be isolated and only developed within the USSR. The success of Brazil and Inter Milan had radically changed the mindset of Soviet coaches. After all, the purpose of international competition was to prove the superiority of Soviet society. Therefore, tactical adjustments were necessary in order to remain successful. Not to discount the developments of Arkadiev and Iakushin, but Kachalin, Beskov, and Morozov displayed a flexible ideology (if only an ideology of soccer) uncommon in the culture, especially considering they personally represented the USSR on an international stage. Yet, one should not assume that every tactical change had political or idealistic undertones. These players and coaches were intense competitors. When the game started, the goal was to win. Not necessarily for the Soviet Union or for socialist ideology, but for themselves. Ultimately, the success of the national team does not belong to their culture, politics, or society; it belongs to the men who played the game.

Chapter 3: Politics on the Pitch: Soccer and Soviet Foreign Policy

Introduction

The final match of Dinamo's 1945 tour of the United Kingdom took place in Glasgow against the top Scottish team of the era, Rangers. Dinamo had already taken Great Britain by storm, tying Chelsea 3-3, thrashing Cardiff City 10-1, and defeating Arsenal 4-3. For most of the British public, Dinamo versus Arsenal was the true highlight of the tour and the game against Rangers was more of an encore for the visiting Soviets rather than a competitive finale to the tour. Still, in Glasgow, Scottish fans and Rangers took the game seriously and expected to defeat Dinamo. As chance had it, Dinamo had nearly a week off before playing Rangers. Naturally, the Soviets used the extra time to train and scout their opponents, but there was also plenty of time to tour Glasgow and enjoy the hospitality of their Scottish hosts.

Throughout the tour, the English Soccer Association and the hosting clubs made an extra effort to welcome their guests. After all, the English Soccer Association had invited Dinamo in order to increase cooperation and friendship between the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union. A warm and accepting environment surrounded each match. Against Chelsea, Dinamo players received flowers before the match, some fans waved the Soviet flag in the crowd, and even a portrait of Joseph Stalin adorned one of the grandstands.²⁰⁶ Not to be outdone, Cardiff City presented the Dinamo squad with miners' lamps in a pre-match ceremony.²⁰⁷

Scottish soccer fans, though, took the greatest efforts to welcome their Soviet guests. The Soviet flag flew alongside St. Andrew's Cross atop of the stadium where the match was to be played. Additionally, the Glaswegian press, either in true admiration of Dinamo or merely writing overly-kind words about them, praised the Soviets' performance and success while on

²⁰⁶ Downing, *Passovotchka*, 84.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 134.

tour. “It was a first-rate idea,” wrote the *Glasgow Evening News*, “to send [the Soviet Union’s] famous football team, the Dynamos to Britain.” In a similar fashion to Soviet soccer fans, the article linked Dinamo’s performance to their culture. “The Russian people have reminded us that impressive virile achievement of a manifold sort may and should be accompanied by communal respect for intellect and art. Therein lies their true greatness.”²⁰⁸ With the Cold War looming over both nations, the article suggested that art and culture, sports included, could be a source of understanding and form of cooperation, stating “A people who love football and can produce a team like the Dynamos cannot be so very different from ourselves... It may be that the biggest victory in history – the victory over mutual understanding and suspicion – will have been won the football fields of Britain.”²⁰⁹ In concluding the column, the journalist proclaimed that soccer served “a great world purpose by promoting human understanding between peoples.”²¹⁰

However, the match itself did not reflect such understanding or friendship. From the start of the match, Rangers displayed their typically British style of aggressive, hard-tackling soccer. This approach hurt them early, though, as Dinamo scored directly from a free-kick to opening the scoring. Yet, Rangers remained aggressive on both offense and defense, and eventually their violent style threw Dinamo off their game. By the end of the first half, Soviet players had resorted to holding, shirt-pulling, and body-checks. The referee awarded penalty-kicks to Rangers on three separate occasions, though they only converted one chance. The game finally ended in 2-2 draw, but even after the match, accusations of cheating and ill-will continued. The Soviets accused the referee of ignoring fouls on their goalkeeper while awarding dubious penalties for the home team. Rangers, on the other hand, suspected that midway through the

²⁰⁸ William Power, “Dynamos as Diplomats,” *Glasgow Evening News*, 11.24.1945.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

second half, Dinamo snuck a twelfth player onto the field.²¹¹ While Dinamo had no more officially scheduled matches remaining, two days after the match in Glasgow, both English and Soviet soccer officials decided that Dinamo would not play any more games and return to the Soviet Union.²¹² What some had hoped would promote friendship and mutual understanding only resulted in bitterness and mistrust.

As the Cold War intensified, the political nature of soccer did so as well. The Soviet Union occupied a new role in the world after the war, one that required interaction with enemies and allies alike. This need for engagement extended to soccer as well. Exhibition matches against teams from Soviet allies promoted cooperation, while competitive games and participation in international tournaments sought to display strength of Soviet sport. Yet, as the match against Glasgow Rangers showed, intentions do not always reflect reality. At times, matches against communist allies resulted in antagonism on and off the field. Moreover, Soviet teams struggled to consistently win games against communist opponents. During the 1950s and 1960s, soccer reflected the complex issues of Soviet foreign policy, such as maintaining order in Eastern Europe, attracting support from non-aligned nations, and proving communist superiority over Cold War enemies.

Soccer and Soviet Foreign Policy

In the first decades of the Soviet Union, sport played little importance in foreign affairs. Following the Bolshevik Revolution, as the USSR sought to spread communism throughout the rest of the world, Soviet officials rejected participation in Western, bourgeois sporting competitions, such as the Olympics and the World Cup; the Soviet Union even refused to

²¹¹ Downing, *Passovotchka*, 228-229.

²¹² "The Dynamo Team," *London Times*, 11.30.1945.

affiliate with those competitions' organizing bodies, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and FIFA, respectively. Instead of international competition against bourgeois organizations, Soviet sport authorities were more concerned with creating an athletic, proletarian culture that encouraged healthy living. Therefore, the Soviet Union created parallel organizations to replace and oppose Western sport. In 1921, Soviet leaders and several worker organizations in Europe formed the Red Sport International (RSI) as a substitute for the IOC. In 1928, the RSI hosted the First Worker Spartakiad, a proletarian version of the Olympic Games.²¹³

However, soccer did not experience that same isolation as other Soviet sports. In the 1920s, Soviet soccer clubs competed against worker-sponsored squads from around Europe. As early as 1922, Soviet clubs toured Finland and Sweden, defeating amateur teams from their respective leagues. In 1924, the Turkish national team played and lost four matches against a Soviet team comprised of Moscow all-stars (a de facto national team). On the surface, the domination of Soviet teams appears impressive, but Soviet squads rarely played quality opposition in the 1920s. Two things hindered scheduling better teams. First, the Soviet Union was not a member of FIFA, and therefore national soccer associations were hesitant to allow their top clubs to travel to the Soviet Union. Secondly, due to political opposition to the USSR, governments opposed to communism occasionally refused to grant visas for Soviet players.²¹⁴

The turning point occurred in October of 1934, when Czechoslovakia allowed Soviet players to play exhibition matches against professional Czech club Zidenice Brno. This club was a significant increase in talent compared to previous Soviet competition. In the mid-1930s, Czech soccer clubs were among the best in Europe; earlier that summer, Czechoslovakia finished

²¹³ James Riordan "The Sports Policy of the Soviet Union, 1917-1941," in *Sport and International Politics: The Impact of Fascism and Communism on Sport*, ed. Pierre Arnaud and James Riordan (London: E & FN Spon, 1998) 71-72.

²¹⁴ Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 48-49.

as runner-up in the World Cup. Nevertheless, the Soviet team defeated Zidenice Brno 3-2.²¹⁵ This victory bolstered Soviet beliefs that proletarian sport was superior to bourgeois sport. Additionally, victory against a professional side garnered respect for Soviet soccer across Europe. After the exhibition match in Czechoslovakia, Soviet teams received more invitations from Western European nations. In the remaining years of the 1930s, Soviet teams both traveled to and hosted more international matches against professional clubs. In 1935 and 1936, Soviet squads journeyed to Paris to compete against teams in the top division of French soccer; they claimed victory in 1935 but were narrowly defeated in 1936.²¹⁶ In 1937, a team of Basque professionals toured the Soviet Union to raise awareness for their cause during the Spanish Civil War; they defeated all but one of their Soviet opponents.

Nearly all international soccer matches ceased during World War Two, but after the war, the Soviet Union, now inhabiting a new position in the balance of global power, changed the role of sport in their foreign policy. Instead of staying largely isolated from the rest of Europe and the world, the USSR saw the benefits of participating in international competition and athletic organizations. There were three major goals of sport within Soviet foreign policy: Attaining supremacy in world sport, thus improving the status of the USSR and communism globally; undermining the authority of bourgeois and capitalist nations over sport; and promoting friendly relations with neighboring and pro-communist nations.²¹⁷

As had been the case before the war, Soviet soccer teams were the first to engage in international competitions to achieve these goals. In November 1945, Dinamo Moscow accepted

²¹⁵ Barbara Keys, "Soviet Sport and Transnational Mass Culture in the 1930s," *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 38, No. 3, 421. Upon traveling to Czechoslovakia, the Soviet team expected to play either Slavia Prague or Sparta Prague, the top two teams in the nation. However, after the Soviets defeated several amateur Czech teams, Zidenice Brno, a weaker team than either Slavia or Sparta, was selected. See Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 50.

²¹⁶ Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 51.

²¹⁷ Riordan, "The Role of Sport in Soviet Foreign Policy," 570-580.

an invitation to play four exhibition matches against British clubs. Dinamo shocked English spectators (and likely pleasantly surprised Soviet fans) by winning twice, drawing twice, and generally outplaying their opponents. The tour was a step in establishing Soviet sport supremacy and eroding the power England held over global soccer. Following the success of Dinamo, other Soviet clubs played abroad. TsSKA traveled to Prague, Spartak Moscow played in Albania, and Dinamo Moscow took another tour, this time through Sweden and Finland. Furthermore, a team of Moscow all-stars hosted Yugoslav and Bulgarian teams, Partizan Belgrade and Lokomotiv Sofia.²¹⁸ These matches promoted the friendly relationship with neighboring and pro-communist nations, strengthening the USSR's ties with those nations.

Overall, while most Soviet sports programs remained isolated from Western Europe, especially during the pre-war period, soccer was always at the forefront of international engagement. At the beginning of the Cold War, soccer continued its role as the USSR main international sport. Through soccer, the Soviet Union was confident it would strengthen ties with its allies, remove the control Western nations held over sport, and prove the worth of communism and Soviet society through sporting victories.

The Hungarian Revolution on the Field, 1952-1955

Following numerous victories in exhibition matches, Soviet officials were optimistic about the chance for success in the 1952 Helsinki Olympics. However, the tournament was much more difficult than expected. In the opening round, the Soviet national team needed extra-time to defeat Bulgaria 2-1. In the next round, the Soviet Union faced Yugoslavia. The USSR fell behind early in the match and, with only thirty minutes left in the match, were losing 5-1. Yet, the

²¹⁸ Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 95.

Soviets rallied and tied the game in the next-to-last minute. Ultimately, the match ended in a 5-5 draw and a replay took place two days later; the Yugoslav team easily defeated the Soviets 3-1 and eliminated them from the tournament. The loss was embarrassing. The USSR had not even reached the quarterfinals. Defeat to Yugoslavia during the height of the Stalin-Tito split only added to the shame of the loss. Soviet newspapers did not even report the elimination of the Soviet national team.

Coverage of soccer at the 1952 Olympic Games did not cease, though. The back pages of *Sovetskii Sport* included results from competitions not involving Soviet athletes, but certain results garnered more attention than others. While the performance of the Soviet national team was exceedingly poor, the Hungarian national team played impressively well. Hungary was the only Soviet ally left in the soccer tournament and therefore, became the new favorite team of the Soviet press. In the first round of the tournament, Hungary defeated traditional soccer power Italy by a score of 3-0.²¹⁹ In the next round, they impressively defeated Turkey 7-1, with goals from five different players. Turkey was a weak opponent and had benefited from the tournament draw to make it to the quarterfinals, but the Hungarians proved their skill by dominating the much more competitive Swedish national team 6-0 in the semifinals.²²⁰ This set up a championship match against Yugoslavia.

The Hungarian squad played solid defense throughout the game but struggled to generate offense. Their star striker, Ferenc Puskas, earned a penalty early in the match, but it was saved by the Yugoslav goalkeeper. Finally, in the 71st minute, Puskas gained possession at the edge of the penalty-box, beat his defenders, drew out the goalkeeper, and slotted a shot underneath him to open the scoring. The goal invigorated the Hungarian squad to keep attacking and they

²¹⁹ “Na futbol’nykh poliakh” *Sovetskii Sport*, 7.22.1952.

²²⁰ Olympiad Helsinki 1952 Football Tournament, *RSSSF*, <http://www.rsssf.com/tables/ol1952f-det.html>.

overwhelmed Yugoslavia for the remainder of the match. “The success gave an even greater boost to the actions of the Hungarian team,” wrote the *Sovetskii Sport* correspondent watching the match. “The passes became more precise and the players moved even faster.”²²¹ The correspondent also highlighted the Yugoslav’s inability to handle the Hungarian strikers. Though they were losing, “the team of Yugoslavia was forced to bring back another player on defense.”²²² Still, the extra defender was not enough; in the 88th minute, Hungarian winger Zoltan Czibor added another goal to leave no doubt that Hungary would win the gold medal. Ultimately, the journalist concluded that Hungary “deservedly won the title of champion” after “demonstrating the highest quality of play.”²²³

Entering the 1952 Olympics, Soviet soccer officials hoped and expected to win gold and secure the position of top team in Europe. Instead, Hungary won the gold medal and obtained the respect the Soviets desired. Despite the Olympic championship, Hungary’s superiority over the rest of Europe was not unanimous. England invented and codified the game, popularized it across the globe, and the national team had never been beaten on British soil. In 1945, Dinamo Moscow defeated two English clubs in England, but these teams were not national rosters and English soccer was still in the process of rebuilding itself. After Hungary’s impressive performance, England invited the national team to play an exhibition match in London.

After over a year of delays and compromises in planning the exhibition, the match finally took place in London’s famed Wembley Stadium on November 25th, 1953. English fans and reporters understood Hungary’s talent: “If all the fame that precedes [Hungary] bears an atom of truth in it, then they will be worthy and great opponents,” wrote the *London Times* soccer

²²¹ “Futbol’naya komanda vengrii – olimpiiskii champion,” *Sovetskii Sport*, 8.4.1952.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

correspondent, “The Hungarians... put their faith in swift, short passing, often carried out in a bewildering pace... the Hungarian attacking system may cause some headaches.” Still, the British were confident in their own ability to exploit their opponent’s offense. “Hungary are essentially an attacking side,” commented the same reporter. “Defensive flaws have been detected in them, especially in the full-backs who may be caught square [out of position]. It is here that England will prod.”²²⁴

Dubbed “The Match of the Century,” over 100,000 spectators arrived at Wembley to watch the match. Hungary’s attack-oriented system did indeed cause headaches from the very start of the match. Within the first minute of the match, three Hungarian attackers confused the English defense and scored on a powerful shot into the top corner of the goal. The Hungarians keep pressing and overwhelmed the English side with their ball control. The Hungarians’ third goal perfectly illustrated this technical superiority. Sandor Kocsis, one of the central forwards, gained possession in the center of the pitch, passed the ball out wide to left winger Czibor, who then lays the ball into the corner for the overlapping full-back. With lots of time and space, the Hungarian full-back crossed the ball to Puskas in the center of the penalty area. English defender Billy Wright attempted a slid tackle, but in a single, smooth movement, Puskas dragged the ball back with his left foot and rocketed a shot past the goalkeeper, all while Wright helplessly slid passed him.²²⁵ By halftime, Hungary led 4-2 and finished the match with a 6-3 victory.

The result shocked English observers. “Outpaced and outmaneuvered by this intelligent exposition of football,” lamented the *London Times*, “England never were truly in the match.”²²⁶ The English defeat signaled the end of British preeminence over soccer. The historic game drew

²²⁴ “Hungary’s XI at Wembley,” *London Times*, 11.25.1953.

²²⁵ “1953 Friendly Match, England – Hungary 3-6” *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBk82pNWAwk>.

²²⁶ “England Lose Record to Great Hungarian XI,” *London Times*, 11.26.1953.

notice in Soviet media as well. *Sovetskii Sport* offered a rather mundane account of the match, but in the closing paragraph, noted the momentous shift and praised the Hungarian side, writing “The combined English soccer team was defeated on its own field for the first time... Thus the Hungarian national soccer team again confirmed its high class and wrote another glorious page in the history of Hungarian people’s sport.”²²⁷ In May of 1954, England played Hungary again, but this time in Budapest. With Hungary’s superiority already proven, the match was not as publicized as the first. Still, Hungary reinforced their positions as world’s best soccer team by defeating England 7-1. After the match, the English players were in awe of their opposition, with one player even commenting “I have never seen anything like it. They were men from another planet.”²²⁸ This time, *Sovetskii Sport* provided a detailed report of the match, emphasizing the talent and technique of the Hungarian side, though the article seemed to praise the defeat of England rather than the victory of Hungary. “The English are suppressed,” claimed the journalist. “They arrived in Budapest in a radiant mood and hopes for success but are forced to leave the field in defeat.”²²⁹ Furthermore, the article stressed the political undertones of the match, highlighting the fact that the First Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party was in attendance and dozens of journalists from other communist nations, such as Czechoslovakia, Poland, and East Germany.²³⁰ In essence, Hungary’s victory was more than an athletic success; it was a triumph for the entirety of Communist Eastern Europe over the traditional powers of Western Europe.

The Hungarian national team was undisputedly the best team in the world and received increased attention in the Soviet press. Typically, *Sovetskii Sport* provided little, if any, coverage

²²⁷ “Vengriia – Angliia,” *Sovetskii Sport*, 11.26.1953.

²²⁸ “England Completely Outclassed,” *London Times*, 5.24.1954.

²²⁹ “Vengriia – Angliia,” *Sovetskii Sport*, 5.25.1954.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

to foreign matches not involving Soviet teams. Even when such matches were covered, it was typically confined to a quarter-page article on the back page. However, the popularity of the Hungarians garnered increased reportage in Soviet media. Even an uneventful exhibition match between Austria and Hungary deserved an article on the front page of *Sovetskii Sport*.²³¹ Furthermore, in the week leading up to the England-Hungary match in Budapest, an editorial praised not just the development of soccer in Hungary, but the physical culture and sport program as a whole.²³²

In 1954, the Soviet Union was therefore not invited to that year's World Cup tournament in Switzerland. However, as reigning Olympic champion, Hungary automatically received an invitation. Without a home team to root for, Soviet press covered the Hungarians as if were their own national team. Soviet journalists listed Hungarian results in articles along with all other World Cup games, but often provided more detail and commentary than on other matches.²³³ The tournament started well as Hungary thrashed first time competitors South Korea 9-0, the largest victory in World Cup history at the time, and then defeated West Germany 8-3.²³⁴ Once in the knockout stage, though, the competition was much fiercer. In the quarterfinals, Hungary faced Brazil in an extremely physical match, which *Sovetskii Sport* described as the "most stressful match of the tournament."²³⁵ Leading 3-2 in the 71st minute a Brazilian defender aggressively fouled a Hungarian forward, prompting a violent retaliation; the referee sent off both players. From then on, the match resembled a brawl rather than a soccer match. Another Brazilian player

²³¹ "Vengriia – Avstriia," *Sovetskii Sport*, 4.13.1954.

²³² "Fizkul'tura i sport v vengrii," *Sovetskii Sport*, 5.21.1954.

²³³ For example, see "Pervenstvo mira po futbolu," *Sovetskii Sport*, 6.19.1954.

²³⁴ "World Cup 1954," RSSSF, <http://www.rsssf.com/tables/54full.html>.

²³⁵ "Na pervenstvo mira po futbolu," *Sovetskii Sport*, 6.28.1954.

was ejected for fighting in the 79th minute. Eventually, Hungary won 4-2 after a late Kocsis goal sealed the game.²³⁶

In the semifinals, Hungary took on defending champions Uruguay in a much more refined, but just a difficult, match. Hungary jumped out to a 2-0 lead at halftime, but Uruguay leveled the score by the end of regulation. In extra-time, Kocsis took control of the match, scoring twice and securing a Hungarian victory.²³⁷ West Germany, whom Hungary had emphatically defeated in the group stage of the tournament, awaited in the final. After defeating Brazil and Uruguay, West Germany appeared to be the last and easiest hurdle on the path to becoming World Cup Champion. Moreover, Puskas, who had been out with an ankle injury since the group stage, returned to the squad. Within the first ten minutes of the match, both Puskas and Czibor contributed a goal and it appeared Hungary's coronation as world champions was all but complete. Yet, within minutes, West Germany added two of their own to equalize the score. As the game progressed, a field soaked from rain the day before became increasingly muddy, hindering Hungary's passing ability. Still, the Hungarians attacked relentlessly but were denied by excellent goalkeeping (as well as two shots which deflected off the frame of the goal). With less than ten minutes remaining, a West German striker found space at the top of the penalty box and struck it low, into the corner of the goal, past the diving Hungarian goalkeeper.²³⁸ West Germany stunned the soccer world en route to their first world championship.

The Soviet Union was not exempt from the shock of Hungary's loss either. The *Sovetskii Sport* report continually emphasized the superior skill of the Hungarians and blamed the loss on poor conditions. "The German soccer players, according to many observers, did not play at a

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ "Pervenstvo mira po futbolu," *Sovetskii Sport*, 7.1.1954.

²³⁸ "West Germany – Hungary WC-1954 Final (3-2)," *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m9UjdKBzIdI>.

high technical level,” stated the article, “but their counterattacks were very dangerous, especially since the conditions in which the match was played were not conducive to a technical game.”²³⁹ Additionally, incompetent refereeing also contributed to the defeat. Six minutes after West Germany’s go-ahead goal, Puskas scored again, only to have it disallowed for offside. Naturally, the Hungarians were upset, but according to most accounts, the call was correct. Even before the ball crossed the goal line, West German defenders were signaling for offside. Also, the German broadcaster stated that Puskas was offside before the ref blew the whistle.²⁴⁰ However, Soviet journalists were not convinced, commenting “Although the English referee Lind stated that Puskas was in an ‘offside’ position, opinions on the issue were sharply divided.”²⁴¹ Who else disagreed with the offside decision was never stated, but the tone of the article was clear: Hungary was the better team, but due to poor weather, inept referees, and bad luck, the World Cup title had been taken from them.

During the first half of the 1950s, the Hungarian national side attained a level of popularity and coverage in *Sovetskii Sport* that rivaled domestic Soviet clubs and even the Soviet national team. Hungarian stars such as Ferenc Puskas and Sandor Kocsis were nearly as well-covered by the Soviet press as stars like Iashin and Simonian. A major goal of Soviet soccer, and all sport, in the international arena was to prove that socialist nations produced better citizens and athletes.²⁴² The Soviet Union had taken a step towards this goal in 1945 when Dinamo Moscow went undefeated against the best clubs England had. However, the Soviet national team then retreated from international attention and did not engage in more high-profile matches, instead opting to compete against lower quality opponents. When the Soviet national team reemerged

²³⁹ “Final,” *Sovetskii Sport*, 7.6.1954.

²⁴⁰ “West Germany – Hungary WC-1954 Final (3-2),” *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m9UjdKBzIdI>.

²⁴¹ “Final,” *Sovetskii Sport*, 7.6.1954.

²⁴² Riordan, *The Role of Sport in Soviet Foreign Policy*, 585.

into foreign competition, they lost dramatically to Yugoslavia. Essentially, when the eyes of the global soccer community were on the Soviet Union, the team failed to live up to expectations. Hungary, however, excelled in the tournament and won the gold medal. The next year, Hungary defeated the English national team in Wembley Stadium, the mecca of European soccer. Lastly, though they lost the final, Hungary captivated spectators at the 1954 World Cup, setting records for both individual and team goals scored in a single tournament.²⁴³

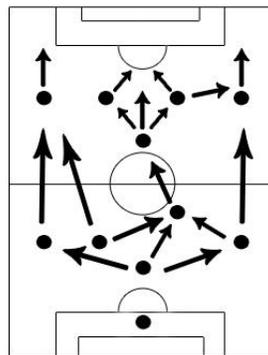


Diagram 9: Hungary's tactics against England, taken from Sebes's notebook (Source: Puskas on Puskas, 92)

It was not only the success of Hungary, but how Hungary achieved their success that captivated Soviet audiences. Like Dinamo Moscow in 1945, Hungary also played a system that emphasized ball possession, skilled passing, and interchangeable positions. It is unclear if Gusztav Sebes, the Hungarian manager, directly based his strategy on Dinamo Moscow, but he also used a base system of a W-M with a withdrawn center-forward. However, Sebes continued to modify the formation, allowing both full-backs to push higher, leaving the center-back as a roaming sweeper. The two inside forwards, usually Puskas and Koscsis also played high upfield, often overlapping the center-forward which player even deeper than Beskov had done while at Dinamo Moscow. Sebes' formation could be called a 1-4-1-4 rather than a W-M. Each of these

²⁴³ "World Cup 1954," RSSSF, <http://www.rsssf.com/tables/54full.html>.

modifications was done so that players had more passing options with the ball, more freedom of movement away from the ball, and ultimately, increased scoring opportunities.

Overall, the Hungarian national team of the early 1950s was the best in the world and revolutionized how the rest of the world played soccer. Their style enthralled soccer fans around the world, but especially in the Soviet Union. Essentially, the Hungarian team accomplished the goals which USSR officials had hoped Soviet soccer would. Dinamo Moscow proved that Soviet teams could compete with English clubs, that communist societies could produce skilled athletes, and that soccer based on teamwork and flexible positions was an alternative to the British model of kick and chase. Hungary went a step further, dominating the English national team in their home stadium, fielding the best soccer players in the world, and transforming the way soccer was played.

The Hungarian Revolution off the Field, 1956-1957

After the World Cup defeat, Hungary recovered and began another undefeated streak of international matches. The team shook off the loss and focused on the next major international tournament: The 1956 Olympics in Melbourne. However, beginning in early 1956, their consistency faltered. They uncharacteristically lost to Turkey, then suffered defeat to Belgium. In May of 1956, Hungary lost 4-2 to Czechoslovakia in Budapest, the Hungarians' first defeat at home since 1943.²⁴⁴ Their irregular play can be attributed to multiple factors. First, Hungary played a full schedule of international matches, and players also had obligations to their domestic clubs as well; many soccer players were worn out by a rigorous schedule. Secondly, the Hungarian Soccer Association was in a state of flux. In 1955, officials removed Gusztav Sebes

²⁴⁴ "Hungary – List of International Matches," *RSSSF*, <http://www.rsssf.com/tablesh/hong-intres.html>.

as manager, though he still remained active in the organization. The new manager sought to bring more young players into the squad to challenge established stars.²⁴⁵ Thirdly, Hungarian society in general was increasingly instable. Political turmoil certainly weighed on players' minds as they represented their nation on the soccer field.

In February of 1956, Nikita Khrushchev delivered a speech at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Known as the "Secret Speech," Khrushchev's speech was critical of Stalin, exposed the crimes he committed, and called for party reform. The speech soon made its way outside of the Soviet Union, including Hungary. There, the anti-Stalin message ignited an already divided political system. Much of the public called for the resignation of Hungarian Communist Party leader Matyas Rakosi and the installment of Imre Nagy, who had been Communist Party General Secretary until 1955. In July, Rakosi left office under pressure from the public and from the Soviet Union, but instead of Nagy, appointed Erno Gero, a like-minded politician, to his position. Protests against the government and Soviet interference in Hungarian politics continued and grew increasingly violent.²⁴⁶

Amidst the deteriorating relationship between Hungary and the Soviet Union, the Hungarian national team traveled to Moscow. The Central Lenin Stadium (now Luzhniki Stadium) had just been completed and a match between the Soviet national team and the Hungarians before over 100,000 spectators was the christening event. The Soviets were hopeful. They, too, were in the process of preparing for the Olympic tournament and victories over other powerful soccer nations, specifically West Germany, increased their confidence. Both teams desired victory for both sporting and political reasons.

²⁴⁵ Ferenc Puskas, *Puskas on Puskas*, ed. & trans. Rogan Taylor and Klara Jamrich (London: Robson Books, 1997), 142.

²⁴⁶ Paul Lendvai, *One Day That Shook the Communist World*, trans. Ann Major (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 43.

Given both teams' proclivity for a passing-based, less physical style of soccer, the match was especially violent. Early on, both teams created chances to score, but only Hungary capitalized; Czibor scored in the 16th minute and it would be the only goal of the match. Yet, the rest of the game contained many more chances. Streltsov beat the Hungarian goalkeeper only to have a retreating defender clear the ball before it completely crossed the goal line. Another Soviet goal was disallowed for offsides.²⁴⁷ Hungary had opportunities to extend their lead too, but Iashin played brilliantly, producing an amazing save from a Kocsis header. "Iashin stretched out his great body and prevented trouble," recalled famed Soviet sportswriter Axel Vartanian, who witnessed the game. "I've watched soccer for more than six decades, but I have not seen anything like it."²⁴⁸ In the second half, as frustration grew, both teams participated in excessive fouling. Soviet coach Gavriil Kachalin commented that "The match was overshadowed by rudeness."²⁴⁹ Still, the scoreboard did not change, and Hungary spoiled the new stadium's opening with a 1-0 victory. The game disheartened the Soviet players, but it affected the Hungarian players and fans beyond the soccer field. "One of the matches we Hungarians were always desperate to win, of course, was any game against the Russians," remembered Puskas. "We finally beat the Soviets in Moscow 1-0, exactly a month before the October Uprising began. But I hadn't realized there were so many people in Hungary who wanted to beat the Russians at more than just soccer."²⁵⁰

In late October, tension in Hungary reached a tipping point. A student-led protest organized over 200,000 people to demand the withdrawal of Soviet troops stationed in Hungary and for

²⁴⁷ "Perviy match na tsentral'nom stadione imeni Lenina," *Sovetskii Sport*, 9.24.1956.

²⁴⁸ Axel Vartanian, "Portnoy Tatushin, shofer Simonian, student Netto," *SportExpress*, http://www.sport-express.ru/newspaper/2010-10-08/9_1/.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ Puskas, *Puskas on Puskas*, 143.

Nagy to take Gero's position. Eventually, student protesters tore down a statue of Stalin, then directly clashed with Soviet and Hungarian security forces while trying to take over a local radio station. The next day, Nagy assumed the position of Prime Minister and demanded that Soviet troops leave Hungary. However, Khrushchev did not recognize Nagy as a legal representative and therefore the demand was not valid.²⁵¹ Ultimately, Khrushchev decided that military force was necessary to quell the protests and restore order. On November 4th, Soviet tanks and troops entered Budapest and after a week of heavy street fighting, the USSR declared victory over what they viewed as a counterrevolution.²⁵²

At the time of the uprising, the Hungarian national team had just returned from an international match in Austria. Each player returned to their domestic club, though many national team players, including Puskas, played from the Hungarian army team, Budapest Honved. However, Hungarian soccer authorities quickly suspended league matches. Once the fighting in the streets escalated, however, concerns about the players' safety increased. At one point, the Hungarian media reported Puskas had been killed in the fighting.²⁵³ In an effort to move the team out of the country as quickly as possible. During the 1956 season, Honved was the Hungarian representative in the newly formed European Cup, a continental tournament for domestic teams. They were scheduled to host Athletic Bilbao (a Spanish club) in Budapest in November. The cup organizers threatened to ban Honved from further tournaments if they did not host the match. Knowing hosting a game in Budapest was impossible, the Hungarian Soccer Association agreed to play the match in Bilbao, hoping that the conflict would be resolved in time to play the second

²⁵¹ Nikita Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, Volume 3: Statesman, 1953-1964*, trans. George Shriver (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 649.

²⁵² Khrushchev, *Memoirs*, 660.

²⁵³ Puskas, *Puskas on Puskas*, 149.

match.²⁵⁴ On November 22nd, Honved lost to Athletic Bilbao in Spain by 3-2. The team stayed abroad the over the next month and, refusing to return to Budapest amid the turmoil. Other teams had also traveled abroad to avoid the fighting. Furthermore, the entire under-21 Hungarian youth team defected while playing a tournament in Belgium.²⁵⁵ Consequently, the Hungarian Soccer Association was unable to field a team in the 1956 Olympics and withdrew from the tournament. The next month, Honved arranged to “host” Athletic Bilbao in Brussels for the second match; they game ended in a 3-3 draw and Honved exited the European Cup.²⁵⁶

Still wary of returning to Hungary, in January of 1957, Honved again decided not to return, instead opting to embark on a fundraising tour in South America. As the team of the Hungarian Army, Honved’s refusal embarrassed and incensed the Hungarian Soccer Association. In response, they offered an ultimatum to the players: Return or be banned from soccer. According to Kalman Vador, a Hungarian journalist, the ultimatums were meant to be a display of strength, both to intimidate the players and impress the Soviet Union. The new Hungarian Soccer Association president Marton Nagy “fancied himself as a ‘hard man’ and felt he had to put on a tough show to impress the Soviets,” recalled Vador. “It was a terrible message to send to our greatest players.”²⁵⁷ As team captain, Puskas faced the harshest punishment, a ban of eighteen months. While most players capitulated, the biggest stars remained abroad. Czibor, Kocsis, and Puskas all defected. First, they initially trained in Italy while FIFA debated the validity of their bans. After several months, FIFA judged the bans illegitimate and allowed the Hungarians to sign contracts with teams outside of Hungary.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 153. In the European Cup, each round consisted of a match at each team’s home stadium with the winner determined by total number of goals scored.

²⁵⁵ Wilson, *Behind the Curtain*, 87.

²⁵⁶ “European Champion’s Cup 1956-1957 – Details” *RSSSF*, <http://www.rsssf.com/ec/ec195657det.html>.

²⁵⁷ Puskas, *Puskas on Puskas*, 165.

Many European clubs wanted the talents of Czibor, Kocsis, and especially Puskas. On their way to tour South America, Honved played an exhibition match in Madrid against a team of Spanish all-stars. The match impressed many Spanish clubs, who were able to establish personal relationships with some of the players. Therefore, in the pursuit of signing the Hungarians, Spanish clubs had an edge over other teams in Europe. Eventually, both Czibor and Kocsis signed for Barcelona, while Puskas signed a contract with Real Madrid. Playing for Spanish clubs was even more offensive than refusing to return to Hungary. In a matter of months, they went from Hungarian heroes to traitors. “When Puskas started playing for Real [Madrid],” recounts fellow player Lajos Tichy, who returned to Hungary, “we heard little more than the results of the matches. You see, the political leaders were blamed by the people for driving him and others out of Hungary.”²⁵⁸ In essence, these three players chose the soccer and lifestyle of fascist Spain over their communist homeland.

Just as the Hungarian national team disintegrated, so did the Soviet fascination and admiration of those players. The defeat to Hungary in Moscow soured the attitudes of many fans. It was exciting when Hungary dominated Western, bourgeois teams. Yet, it seemed improper that they defeated the nation which began the communist revolution. When Hungarian players refused to return to Hungary and eventually settled in fascist Spain, Soviet media refused to cover their performances any longer. The Hungarian national team had served as the second-team for Soviet media and soccer fans for years, but all respect faded away and disdain took its place.

²⁵⁸ Puskas, *Puskas on Puskas*, 179.

Soviet-Spanish Relations

The move to Spain irked the Soviet Union both in terms of both politics and soccer. Fascist Spain was a natural political enemy of the communist Soviet Union, but the two nations also shared a history on the soccer field. Spanish players held a unique place in Soviet soccer history. In 1937, during the Spanish Civil War, a squad of all-stars from Basque toured Europe, raising awareness and funds for their anti-Franco cause. The Basques stayed in the USSR for over two months, playing nine matches and winning all but one game. Their success inspired Soviet teams to adopt their W-M formation and move on from the obsolete 2-3-5 system.

However, pro-Franco forces prevailed, and Spain became an enemy of the Soviet Union. After World War Two, Spain and the USSR had no soccer-related interaction. The Soviet Union limited its international matches to typically weaker, Eastern European opponents, and Spain followed a similar path, scheduling neighboring countries such as Portugal, Italy, and France more frequently (though these opponents were much tougher than, say, Finland). Spain placed fourth at the 1950 World Cup in Brazil, but as the USSR did not even attempt to qualify. Additionally, Spain did not emphasize Olympic participation in any sport, and therefore, did not qualify for either Olympic soccer tournament during the 1950s. Both nations were attempting to build a national team to win internationally and validate their government and culture but took separate paths to reach this goal.

Another difference in Spanish soccer was the focus on domestic clubs. In the Soviet Union, while Moscow was the epicenter of soccer, Dinamo Tbilisi, Dinamo Kiev, and Zenit Leningrad also boasted strong squads. Also, five Moscow-based teams typically played in the Soviet Top League. Therefore, Soviet talent was spread-out across the nation. Spain, however, funneled its talent to only a handful of clubs. Two Madrid clubs, Real Madrid and Atletico de

Madrid, as well as Barcelona received the top Spanish players. The best of these three clubs, Real Madrid, became an important tool in Spanish foreign policy. After World War Two, the Franco regime attempted to distance itself from its fascist origins and symbols, but Europe still boycotted Spain economically and diplomatically. To improve the image of Spain, Real Madrid became Franco's European ambassador. Real Madrid president Santiago Bernabeu reflected this purpose, stating "Our club, and all of us, carry with us our affection and our obligations to our country, and deeply engrave in our conscience is the idea of seeking and finding, at every opportunity, something which will effectively reflect the glory and prestige of Spain."²⁵⁹

As a method to further this effort, Spain enthusiastically supported the creation of the European Cup in 1955, a tournament between domestic clubs to determine the best team on the continent. The organizers did not ask the Soviet Union to participate, but invitations were extended to Poland, Hungary, and Yugoslavia. Real Madrid won the inaugural tournament, but nearly forfeited their semifinal match as the Spanish government refused to entry to Partizan Belgrade. Eventually, Spanish soccer officials smuggled the Yugoslav team past customs and passport control, only to be beaten 4-0 by Real Madrid.²⁶⁰ The tournament was hugely popular and expanded its number of participants to 28 by 1959. More communist nations joined, such as Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria. However, the Soviet Union continually declined to send a team.

The addition of Ferenc Puskas to Real Madrid's roster in 1959 only served to deter Soviet participation. In the Soviet perspective, the European Cup encouraged capitalism and corruption. "Regulations of the European Cup," wrote an editor of *Futbol i Khokkei*, "allow the purchase and

²⁵⁹ Teresa Gonzalez Aja, "Spanish Sports Policy in Republican and Fascist Spain," in *Sport and International Politics: The Impact of Fascism and Communism on Sport*, ed. Pierre Arnaud and James Riordan (London: E & FN Spon, 1998), 109-110.

²⁶⁰ Kier Radnedge, *50 years of the European Cup and Champions League* (London: Carlton Books, 2005), 19.

sale of players, and performances of anyone, under the guise of a club... Thus, there is a coarse intervention of money in sports.”²⁶¹ The article also attacked allowing the defending cup champion to enter the tournament automatically, even if the club did not win its domestic league the season before; a situation which allowed Real Madrid to win five straight titles. Essentially, to Soviet observers, the tournament was a fixed system to keep popular, established teams like Real Madrid at the forefront of European soccer. “In our opinion, the cup system needs reformed... in order to keep ‘Don’ Bernebeu from influencing the fate of the cup.”²⁶² Lastly, such stagnation ruined the level of competition. The article ended with the pessimistic line, “For now we are dealing with a distressing reality, a dull reality, of the European Cup.”²⁶³



Figure 5: South America leads the Madrid squad with the caption “the Real Madrid team – ‘pride of European soccer’ - runs out onto the field” (Source: *Futbol i Khokkei*, 6.19.1960)

In actuality, the European Cup was far from dull. The 1960 edition of tournament saw the most thrilling final to date. Real Madrid, let by their international rosters of superstars, which now included a fit and in-form Puskas, faced Eintracht Frankfurt from West Germany. After going down by a goal early, Real Madrid rallied in dramatic fashion; Argentine star Alfredo di

²⁶¹ B. Beknazar-Iuzbashev, “Unylaia realnost (polemika),” *Futbol i Khokkei*, 6.19.1960.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

Stefano scored a hatrick while Puskas netted four goals in a 7-3 victory. “Everything we did seemed to come off and though we started slowly,” said Puskas, remembering the final, “once we hit that peak we felt we could beat any side in the world... The whole team struck gold at the same time. It was a privilege to be there.”²⁶⁴ The Soviet media did not cover the match extensively, though. *Sovetskii Sport* opted to focus that issue’s international coverage on Raymond Kopa, a French player who left the Real Madrid team midway through the season to return to France.²⁶⁵ Amidst the article denouncing the European Cup, *Futbol i Khokkei* merely stated that “the match was really exciting,” but lamented the number of foreign players fielded by Real Madrid, especially the “infamous Hungarian renegade Puskas.”²⁶⁶ In the end, politics kept the Soviet media from acknowledging a thrilling tournament final.

The soccer paths of Spain and the Soviet Union finally crossed shortly after Real Madrid’s victory. Another tournament, the inaugural European Nation’s Cup (essentially a World Cup tournament, but only for European countries) took place in 1960. Many prominent soccer nations, such as England and West Germany, chose not to compete, but both Spain and the Soviet Union entered the competition and were drawn to face each other in the quarterfinals. The format copied the European Cup, which required two matches at each team’s home stadium. This meant the Spanish team had to play in Moscow while the Soviet team needed to travel to Madrid, a situation neither team enjoyed. However, Spain decided to withdraw from the tournament rather than play a home-and-away series with the USSR. The decision stunned and insulted Soviet officials. “The USSR Federation of Soccer is deeply indignant at the interference of the Franco authorities, which thwarted the meeting of Spanish and Soviet soccer players,” stated the

²⁶⁴ *Puskas on Puskas*, 197.

²⁶⁵ “Okh, uzhe etot Kopa!” *Sovetskii Sport*, 6.19.1960.

²⁶⁶ B. Beknazar-Iuzbashev, “Unylaia realnost (polemika),” *Futbol i Khokkei*, 6.19.1960.

organizations official statement in *Sovetskii Sport*. “Fascist Franco and his henchmen have long been known for their hostility to friendly contacts.”²⁶⁷ Additionally, the Soviet Soccer Federation used the statement to criticize Franco’s government as a whole, writing “Unfortunately, the Spanish Soccer Federation did not find enough courage to make a strong protest against the violation elementary democratic freedoms.”²⁶⁸ *Sovetskii Sport* also featured a letter written, presumably, by the members of the Soviet national team. “The arbitrary act by the Franco government testifies... its effort to bring elements of the Cold War into Sport.”²⁶⁹ Apparently, the hypocrisy of Soviets disapproving the introduction of politics into sport was not considered by the editors of *Sovetskii Sport*, as the USSR had avoided participation in previous World Cups and European Cup tournaments on political grounds. From a Spanish perspective, it may be that Franco was not worried about the Spanish team traveling to Moscow as he was about the Soviet team playing in Madrid. He did not want the Soviet anthem to be played nor the Soviet flag to be flown at the stadium.²⁷⁰ Allegedly Franco feared the match would double as communist propaganda and potentially rally for Spanish Civil War exiles and supports of the Spanish Republic.²⁷¹ Regardless of the reasoning, the Soviet Union advanced through forfeit and eventually won the championship that summer.

Four years later, the two squads were set to face each other again. However, this time it was in the championship and Spain was hosting the tournament. Neither Spain nor the Soviet Union could afford to withdraw from the match. Franco was still uneasy about a Soviet presence in Madrid and feared that if the visitors won, he would have to present the trophy to a

²⁶⁷ “Zaiavlenie federatsii futbola SSSR,” *Sovetskii Sport*, 5.28.1960.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ “Futbolistam sbornoy komandy Ispanii,” *Sovetskii Sport*, 5.28.1960.

²⁷⁰ Payne, *The Franco Regime*, 531.

²⁷¹ Jimmy Burns, *La Roja: How Soccer Conquered Spain and How Spanish Soccer Conquered the World* (New York: Norton Books, 2012) 176.

communist.²⁷² Fortunately for him, though, Spain won the championship in an exciting match. Both teams scored within the first ten minutes, but the defenses kept their opposing attacks silent until the 84th minute, when a Spanish striker capitalized on a Soviet defensive error to score the winning goal. The victory was a momentous triumph for Franco and Spain. It was the nation's first championship won by the Spanish national team, but more importantly, it was Franco's political victory over communism. Spanish player Jesus Pereda recounts the final, stating "When we played in Madrid, it was pure politics...It was Franco against communism. For him it was not just a battle, it was war."²⁷³

From a soccer perspective, the Soviet loss was tolerable. Defeating a skilled team such as Spain in their home stadium would be a tough task for any team in the world; the Soviets matched the Spaniards evenly only until the final few minutes. *Futbol i Khokkei* detailed every squandered scoring opportunity by the Soviets and described the players as "uncomfortable" and "confused" on the pitch.²⁷⁴ The close defeat was difficult for the players. In Igor Netto's autobiography, published a decade after the championship loss, he barely discusses the tournament.²⁷⁵ Vartanian, granted a biased observer, concluded that making the Soviet team uncomfortable was a purposeful strategy by the Spanish Soccer Federation; the start time was moved up two hours, during peak mid-day heat.²⁷⁶ Despite the conditions, the Soviet team played admirably and came close to winning back-to-back European Nation's Cups. However, on a political level, the defeat was disastrous. Fascism had defeated communism, at least of the soccer pitch. Khrushchev was furious and removed Konstantin Beskov as national team

²⁷² Ibid, 186.

²⁷³ Burns, *La Roja*, 186.

²⁷⁴ "Upornaia bor'ba v finale," *Futbol i Khokkei*, 6.22.1964.

²⁷⁵ Netto, *Eto Futbol*, 103.

²⁷⁶ Vartanian, "Segodnia takoe sochli by triumfom," *SportExpress*, http://www.sport-express.ru/newspaper/2013-02-04/7_1/.

manager; he occupied the position only a few months. The irrational firing of Beskov was one of Khrushchev's final actions before being removed from power only a few months later.²⁷⁷

Hungary Resurgent

While Spain and the Soviet Union were two of the best teams in Europe during the early 1960s, Hungary was quietly rebuilding a very competitive team. After the disintegration of the national team, a handful of stars from the World Cup team remained, but the most the roster was filled with emerging, young talent. In 1958, Hungary managed to qualify for the World Cup, but could not move past the group stage. In 1960, they earned a bronze medal at the Rome Olympics and in 1962, progressed to the quarterfinal round before losing to eventual runners-up Czechoslovakia.

In 1964, Hungary surprisingly defeated France to qualify for the European Nation's Cup. In the semi-finals, they faced Spain. The Hungarians who had defected to Spain and became Spanish citizens – Puskas, Czibor, and Kocsis – no longer played for the national team, but tensions between the two nations remained intense. The match was physical from the first whistle, though the referee awarded very few fouls. The Spaniards opened the scoring in the 35th minute, but the Hungarians equalized only six minutes from the end of regulation, forcing extra-time. However, even worse than the aggressive play on the field was violence emanating from the crowd. During extra-time, the crowd, perhaps fearing losing, grew agitated and began insulting the Hungarian team. Then several bottles were thrown at the Hungarian bench; the Spanish police force acting as security only removed a single fan from the stadium. Such behavior "indicates the lack of necessary order for the Madrid stadium in such a crucial

²⁷⁷ Edelman, *Spartak Moscow*, 239.

match.”²⁷⁸ Eventually, the Spanish side scored the winning goal in the 122nd minute to advance. Hungary, only eight years removed from the loss of their greatest players, had been close to reaching the final to meet the Soviet Union.

The new Hungarian side of the 1960s revolved around young players. Ferenc Bene captained the 1964 team at only age nineteen, but twenty-two-year-old Florian Albert was the heart of the team. His dribbling and striking skills drew comparisons to Puskas, but Albert was younger, thinner, and quicker. In the 1962 World Cup, Albert tied as the top goal scorer of the tournament and FIFA named him Best Young Player of the tournament.²⁷⁹ Heading into the 1966 World Cup, the young group of Hungarians which had overachieved early in the decade were now hitting the peak of their career. Therefore, Hungary was a popular choice to advance far in the tournament and a dark-horse pick to win the championship. Yet, after an opening defeat to Portugal, Hungary needed to beat two-time defending champion Brazil in order to advance out of the group stage. Stunningly, the Hungarians thrashed the Brazilians 3-1, dominating the ball from the very start of the match. Journalist Gyorgy Szepesi praised the aggressive approach. “At a time when the static, defensive style seemed to dominate the game, they brought... a glimpse of the majestic spectacular football that combines beauty, fascinating movement and artistically designed and taken goals.”²⁸⁰ Hungary finished the group stage with another 3-1 win, this time over Bulgaria; they entered the knock-out with confidence and momentum.

The quarterfinal draw pitted Hungary against the Soviet Union. Not only was the fixture politically charged off the field, but on the field the two sides differed from each other. The Soviet Union employed a defensive-minded approach and relied on counter-attacks to generate

²⁷⁸ “Ravnovesie i odin udar,” *Futbol i Khokkei*, 6.22.1964.

²⁷⁹ “World Cup 1962,” *RSSSF*, <http://www.rsssf.com/tables/62full.html>.

²⁸⁰ Gyorgy Szepesi, *Hungarian Football Rhapsody: 70 Years of Soccer History*, trans. Istvan Butykai (Budapest: Pannonia Press, 1968), 55.

offense, while Hungary depended on ball-possession and movement. The day of the match, *Sovetskii Sport* printed an article detailing the two nations' soccer history with one another, listing both Soviet victories and losses to the Hungarians, including the 1956 meeting in Moscow, but made no mention of the politics surrounding the match.²⁸¹ In the quarterfinal match, the Soviet Union capitalized on two defensive mistakes by the Hungarian defense to take a two-goal lead. Hungary added a second-half goal but could not equalize and lost 2-1.²⁸² In the post-match report, however, the Soviet press resumed their adoring praise of the Hungarian squad. "This victory is all the more gratifying," stated *Sovetskii Sport*, "since our friends have shown in this championship such a game that puts them among the best teams in the world."²⁸³

As the decade before, the Soviet press treated Hungary on almost equal terms as the Soviet national team. Perhaps the Soviet journalists felt pity for the breakup on the team in 1956, or maybe the tone would have been different if the Soviet Union had lost, but the Soviets praised the Hungarians nonetheless. The revitalized coverage of the Hungarian national team mirrored the restored political relationship between the USSR and Hungary. In the years following Soviet military intervention, new Hungarian prime minister Janos Kadar systematically eliminated those involved in the uprising; by 1958, the high-profile revolutionaries were either arrested or executed. With all remnants of the uprising removed, relations between Hungary and the Soviet Union quickly resumed to pre-1956 friendliness.²⁸⁴

In both soccer and politics, Hungary posed a threat to the Soviet Union. The Hungarian national team was poised to beat the Soviet Union to the rank of greatest team in the world while political revolutionaries fought to break away from Soviet influence. The ruthless Soviet military

²⁸¹ "Itak, Vengrii," *Sovetskii Sport*, 6.23.1966.

²⁸² "USSR vs Hungary," *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rf2k7pOyaMU>.

²⁸³ "Trudniy rubezh preodolen," *Sovetskii Sport*, 7.24.1966.

²⁸⁴ Lendvai, *One Day That Shook the Communist World*, 219-223.

intervention ended both threats. In 1966, the Hungarian national team once again threatened to overtake the Soviet team. Yet as before, the Soviet Union ended Hungarian soccer ambitions. Only instead of through political and military intervention, this time the Soviets beat the Hungarians on the soccer field.

Conclusion

The Golden Age of Soviet soccer largely coincided with the best years for both the Hungarian and Spanish national teams as well. As these nations' politics were intertwined during the 1950s and 1960s, so too were their soccer teams. At the beginning of the 1950s, Hungary displayed a superior and innovative style of soccer, dominating traditionally powerful soccer nations and nearly winning the World Cup. The Soviet Union enjoyed their success as proof of the superiority of communist sport. However, Hungary's success also threatened the Soviet Union's position, at least athletically, as the leader of communist Europe. The Hungarian soccer threat combined with social and political challenges to Moscow in 1956, which ended with Soviet military intervention in Budapest and the break-up of the Hungarian national team.

The biggest Hungarian stars fled to fascist Spain, further worsening Soviet attitudes toward Hungarian soccer. Puskas, Czibor, and Kocsis ended up playing for the largest domestic clubs in the Spanish league. The addition of the Hungarian defectors provided the Soviet Union with an athletic reason to further dislike their political rival. The Spanish system of soccer was the complete opposite of the Soviets, the Spanish League emphasized strong domestic clubs, embraced adding foreign players to their roster, and initiated competition competitions. Still, these conflicting approaches produced two of the best teams of the decade, culminating in a European Nation's Cup for each country. However, both teams also suffered embarrassment;

Spain drew international ire for withdrawing from the tournament and the Soviet Union lost in Madrid and had to watch Franco present the trophy to his own team.

Soviet foreign policy played a large role in both the success and failures of the national team. On the field, the foreign relations surrounding the Soviet national team benefited the squad. After the conclusion of World War Two, the increase in foreign competition ultimately improved the quality of Soviet players and the national team. The Soviet Union's two tournament championships came in the 1956 Olympics and the 1960 European Nations Cup. Yet, both tournaments were complicated by the withdrawal of Hungary in 1956 and Spain in 1960. It is possible that the Soviet Union would have still won each respective tournament, but their path to the championship was made much easier. However, after 1966 World Cup, the ramifications of Soviet foreign relations negatively affected the success of the Soviet soccer. During the 1966-1967, the Soviet Union finally agreed to send their title winning team to the European Cup, creating the potential to play teams like Real Madrid or Barcelona. Yet, in 1968, political tensions surrounding the Prague Spring caused the organizers of the European Cup to place all Eastern European against each other in the opening round. The Soviet Soccer Federation protested and when UEFA refused to re-draw the matches, they led the communist European nations in a boycott of the tournament. However, the influence of the Soviet Union was not as powerful as they wished. The representatives from Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania refused to participate in the boycott.²⁸⁵ Additionally, a political decision definitively ended the Golden Age of Soviet soccer. In the process of qualifying for the 1974 World Cup, the Soviet Union needed to defeat Chile in a two-game, home and away series. The first match in Moscow ended in a scoreless draw, but before the second match could be played in Chile, a

²⁸⁵ Radnedge, *50 Years of European Cup and Champions League*, 76.

military coup installed the anti-communist Augusto Pinochet. The Soviets refused to play a match in the same stadium which the Pinochet regime used as a prison and torture site. When an alternate venue was not chosen, the Soviet Soccer Federation withdrew from the tournament.²⁸⁶ After forfeiting from the 1974 World Cup, the national team failed to qualify for another international tournament until 1982.

Overall, Soviet soccer reflected the complex nature of Soviet foreign policy during the 1950s and 1960s. Concerning the goals of proving the superiority of communist athletics and promoting friendly relations, the results were mixed. The national team succeeded in several tournaments, but also habitually underachieved and lost high-profile matches against political rivals. In Eastern Europe, many exhibition matches between communist clubs were held, but the friendly relationship on the field failed to solve any problems off the field.

²⁸⁶ “30 for 30 Soccer Stories S01 E03 The Opposition,” *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TX_qj2b-3oA.

Conclusion and Epilogue

Between 1950 and 1970, Soviet soccer improved dramatically, and the USSR became a highly competitive nation in international soccer. The years from 1956 to 1966 were the peak of success. In that decade, the Soviet Union national soccer team experienced the most successful decade in their history. Out of the six international tournaments they entered, the team won the championship twice, finished as runner-up once, and always advanced to at least the quarterfinals. Soviet stars Lev Iashin, Igor Netto, and Eduard Streltsov had the best years of their careers during this decade.

This decade was also a period of dramatic transformation in Soviet society as well. Domestically, Khrushchev worked to move past the legacy and negative effects of Stalinism while on the international level, the Soviet Union was a principal combatant in the Cold War. Therefore, Khrushchev needed to simultaneously promote socialism and Soviet ideology worldwide while reforming Soviet society domestically. Success in sport, especially soccer, was a method to achieve both these feats. Victorious Soviet athletes that embodied values of Soviet masculinity, modesty, and discipline provided socialist role models for fans, both at home and abroad. Soviet clubs that played an attractive style of soccer based on ideological principles proved that a communist culture could produce highly skilled and competitive. Lastly, soccer offered the Soviet Union a mode of direct competition with hostile nations; if advancements in military technology and space flight could not confirm the USSR's superiority, perhaps victory on the soccer field could.

Yet, victory often proved to be elusive for the Soviet Union. The two championships, both won against Yugoslavia, certainly elevated the status of Soviet soccer, but the national team also lost to political rivals in high-profile matches: Fascist Spain in the 1964 European Nations Cup final and capitalist West Germany in the 1966 World Cup semifinals. Especially when

compared to the success of the Soviet national ice hockey team and Soviet Olympians, the national soccer team continually fell short of the expectations set by government officials, sports journalists, and fans.

Additionally, the effort to export Soviet culture through soccer also exposed Soviet audiences to Western, capitalist forms of the sport. As the Soviet Union gradually integrated with global soccer organizations, foreign audiences of Soviet soccer increased. However, so too did Soviet audiences of Western soccer. This contact with foreign players, clubs, and fans undermined the effort to maintain a distinctly Soviet version of soccer. Instead of acting as a tool for victory in the Cold War, soccer itself became a battleground between Soviet and Western ideologies.

Throughout the golden age, Soviet teams, players, coaches, and fans gradually became more Western. The image of Soviet soccer players evolved away from the typical masculine Russian athlete and increasingly resembled superstars from Western nations and clubs. The style of Soviet soccer incorporated attributes of Western soccer into its tactics to remain competitive. The Soviet Soccer Federation moved away from isolationist philosophy of the late 1940s and early 1950s, even to the point of boycotting the European Cup when UEFA grouped Eastern Bloc nations together (a move which likely would have pleased the Soviet Soccer Federation ten years earlier).

The struggle to maintain a unique version of soccer in the Soviet Union was symptomatic of Soviet society as a whole. The success of the Soviet national team coincided with the peak of Khrushchev's reforms and new economic, political, and social programs. Many in the Soviet Union enthusiastically supported the new plans and were excited about the prospect of achieving true communism. However, this period was followed by an era of economic stagnation and

disillusionment in Soviet society. Similarly, after the end of the golden age, the quality of Soviet soccer, especially on the national level, dropped significantly. The national team failed to qualify for either the World Cup or the European Nations Cup for over a decade. The national did not reach the final of a major tournament until 1988, only to have a promising generation of players broken up with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In many ways, Soviet soccer, even during the golden age, reflected the fluctuations between hope and disappointment in Soviet society.

In the summer of 2018, Russia will host the FIFA World Cup. For the first time, the world's most popular athletic competition will take place of Russian soil. Naturally, excitement and expectation of the Russian national team are high. Yet, the legacy of the Golden Age of Soviet soccer still looms over the current generation of players, coaches, and fans. Even the official World Cup poster features Lev Iashin In many ways, the same issues facing Soviet soccer during its Golden Age are present in Russian soccer in the lead up to the tournament. Appropriate player and fan behavior, maintaining a distinctly Russian style of soccer, and political conflicts have dominated the headlines leading up to the tournament.



Figure 6: The 2018 World Cup Poster featuring Lev Iashin (Source: FIFA.com)

When Russia was awarded the right to host the tournament in 2010, the Russian team had recently reached the semifinals of the 2008 European Nations Cup, playing an entertaining,

offensive-oriented style of soccer. At the time FIFA awarded the World Cup, Russia appeared to be a reinvigorated and rapidly improving soccer nation. “The decision corresponds with FIFA’s philosophy for developing soccer, especially in those regions of the world where that development is needed,” commented then Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.²⁸⁷ However, concerns about Russia hosting the World Cup quickly emerged.

Among the main issues regarding Russian soccer was the actions of their fans inside and outside the stadium. Russia participated in the 2012 European Nations Cup, co-hosted by Poland and Ukraine. The Russian team itself was uninspiring, but travelling fans acted controversially. FIFA fined the Russian soccer federation after fans chanted racist insults against a black player during their opening match against the Czech Republic. In their second match, in Warsaw against host nation Poland, Russian fans unfurled a giant banner picturing a *bogaty*r (a traditional Russian warrior) with the phrase “This is Russia” across the bottom. This deliberate act of antagonism resulted in chaotic fighting after between Russian and Polish fans after the match.²⁸⁸ Four years later during the 2016 edition of the same tournament, Russian hooligans increased their degree of violence, inciting riots both in the stadium and on the streets against English fans. The violence was so severe that FIFA considered disqualifying Russia midway through the tournament.²⁸⁹ In the lead up the 2018 World Cup, Russian hooligan groups have threatened to fight and intimidate foreign fans.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ “Russia & Qatar will host the 2018 and 2022 World Cups,” *BBC Sport*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/football/9250612.stm>.

²⁸⁸ Michael Schwirtz, “Threat of Russian Hooliganism Looms Over Championships,” *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/16/sports/soccer/russian-hooliganism-looms-over-euro-2012.html>.

²⁸⁹ “Euro 2016: 150 trained Russian hooligans flew to Marseille to show ‘the English are girls,’” *The Telegraph*, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/football/2016/06/13/euro-2016-150-trained-russian-hooligans-flew-to-marseille-to-sho>.

²⁹⁰ “What awaits England fans at the World Cup in Russia?” *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/08/world-cup-russia-2018-will-it-all-kick-off-hooligan-threat>.

On the field, Russia's performances have faltered as well. After their semifinal run in 2008, Russia has failed to either qualify or advance past the group stage in every tournament. Even when Russia hosted the 2017 Confederations Cup, a warm-up tournament for the World Cup, the Russian team only earned a single victory. Much of the issues plaguing the Russian national team is a return to isolationist policies. While Russian teams compete in international tournaments, new rules from the Russian Soccer Federation require national team players to play for clubs located in Russia. Therefore, many of Russia's top players left foreign leagues to compete in the less-competitive Russian league, resulting in the decline of their play.

Still, many international players from around the world compete in the Russian league. Over the past decade, many of the top players in Russia have come from Europe and South America. However, the influx of non-Russian players has not pleased some Russian fans. African players have been the target of multiple racist actions. Even the largest supporter group by Russian League champion Zenit Saint Petersburg sent a letter to the club, urging the owner to sell the team's dark-skinned players.²⁹¹ However, other foreign players have obtained Russian citizenship and may even feature on Russia's World Cup roster.²⁹² Whatever the ethnic make-up of the players in the Russian League, the development of the national team has stagnated over the past decade and Russia will enter the World Cup as the lowest ranked team in the field; the first time the host nation has been the lowest ranked.

Lastly, Russia's participation in international tournaments is still surrounded by political controversy. Soon after Russia was selected as hosts, concerns over racism and LGBT rights

²⁹¹ "Zenit St Petersburg fans petition club to sack black players and demand all-white heterosexual team," *The Telegraph*, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/competitions/champions-league/9750764/Zenit-St-Petersburg-fans-petition-club-to-sack-black-players-and-demand-all-white-heterosexual-team.html>

²⁹² The players are both originally from Brazil: Mario Fernandes and Guilherme Marinato. See *Russian Football News*, <http://russianfootballnews.com/16-guilherme/>.

caused some to call for nations to withdraw from the tournament.²⁹³ Calls for boycott increased in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea. United States senator Dan Coats compared Russia's World Cup to Nazi Germany hosting the 1936 Olympics.²⁹⁴ Finally, after political controversy, scandal directly affected Russia's athletic program. The International Olympic Committee discovered that numerous Russian athletes had taken illegal performance enhancing drugs. The IOC immediately stripped those athletes of their medals, but later investigation discovered that the doping was condoned by the state. As a result, the Russian Olympic committee was officially banned at the 2018 Pyongchang Winter Olympics.²⁹⁵ Naturally, soccer journalists and fans were concerned if state-sponsored doping extended to the soccer team. Russian sports minister Vitaly Mutko has repeatedly denied the allegations, but the illegal drug use has only increased calls for boycott.

For better or worse, the 2018 World Cup will be a defining moment in Russian soccer history. Amid the controversy surrounding the tournament, former FIFA president Sepp Blatter continually supported Russia and hopes the World Cup will be a "force for good."²⁹⁶ Success on the soccer field seems unlikely for Russia; the squad could likely advance out of their group, but anything more would be an overachievement. The real opportunity for success for Russia lies off the field. A tournament without scandal, whether from fans, players, or protesters, would improve foreign perception of Russia. Hopefully, the World Cup will be a defining moment that improves the quality of Russian soccer as well as Russia's relationship with the rest of the world.

²⁹³ "Yaya Toure: Black players may boycott 2018 Russia World Cup," *BBC Sport*, <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/24660581>

²⁹⁴ Stuart Winter, "US calls for FIFA to drop Russia from hosting World Cup I 2018," *Express*, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/466357/US-calls-for-Fifa-to-drop-Russia-from-hosting-World-Cup-in-2018>.

²⁹⁵ Rebecca Ruiz, "Russian Banned From Winter Olympics by I.O.C." *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/05/sports/olympics/ioc-russia-winter-olympics.html>

²⁹⁶ "World Cup should be held in Russia, Nick Clegg says," *BBC Sport*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-28508509>.

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