

Example by StudyDriver

Source: <https://studydriver.com/sports-media-in-the-cold-war-era/>

Sports Media in the Cold War Era Example

The Significance of Western Sports Media in the Cold War Era

During the Cold War, the battle of ideologies spanned much more than the political spectrum. The rivalries between Western and Eastern Bloc countries in the field of international sport were a tool used by the both sides alike to establish dominance over each other, as well as to display the success of their ways of living on a world stage. During these times, western sports media was used almost as political propaganda to spread some forms of anti-Soviet sentiment. By building rivalries between the Eastern and Western Bloc countries in sports media, western writers were able to influence their citizens perception of communist athletes, and in turn, their countries. Sports media was some of the most important and influential writing to come out during the Cold War era.

All forms of media had a significant impact on spreading propaganda and pushing political agendas. The Cold War was a battle of ideology and influence, and every government took part in making sure they maintained that influence over their citizens. According to British Scholar John Jenks, by the end of the second World War every major newspaper in London had some sort of political bias or was influenced by the government directly (15-16).

This bias in the media shows how companies, and even the government directly, were trying to influence the opinions of readers. Large scale media influence was critically important to the British government because they wanted to maintain an image of power and strength. Jenks argued that in the eyes of the government, large-scale media influence was almost as essential to military power on achieving that goal (18-19). As the American and Soviet media platforms became more and more prominent in international news the British government had to push more propaganda towards the public to maintain that image. The government capitalized on the success and reach that the BBC had in the late 1940's and early 1950's by using their public television platform to spread said propaganda to the British masses.

However the British government wasn't the only one pushing propaganda. Both the Soviet and the American media peddled their own as well. According to Laura Belmonte in her book *Selling the American way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War*, the United States ran media campaigns that promoted democracy and capitalism and applied it to every facet of American life. The United States Information Agency (USIA) ran campaigns such as *Democracy Begins in the Home*, and had mottos such as *The red target is your home* (Belmonte 136-138), in order to target the common American housewife, and put them against the red menace.

The USIA also sent out pamphlets to promote capitalism by interviewing women from former fascist and communist countries and asking them questions that highlighted the struggles of communism, such as food rationing and long lines in front of shops during wartime (140). African Americans were targeted in a similar fashion. In some cases interviews with laborers from other countries would talk about how African American citizens had the best opportunities in America, and as far as they could tell they were free (170). This was to combat Soviet propaganda, which heavily targeted United States race relations, and try and show black America that they were in a good position in America and make them proud to be American. Soviets tried to push stereotypes of how the United States treated African Americans, so much so that the USIA would combat it in propaganda pamphlets about tourism mailed to US citizens with their papers. They would highlight Russian citizens learning about African Americans, such as in a 1959 state department guide which said:

Some of the Soviets are surprised to hear that Negroes have schools at all, and many are surprised to learn that in Little Rock the troops were on the side of integration, rather than trying to prevent it. It is news to many of them that in most parts of the U.S. children of all races have been attending the same schools for years without significant incidents. Some do not know that lynch law is not actually a law, and that lynching is actually illegal everywhere in the U.S. Many do not know that the Ku Klux Klan is generally condemned or that Paul Robeson is a wealthy man (166-167).

Media outlets from both the west and the east worked with their respective governments to create and spread propaganda in order to maintain influence over their citizens. Whether it was questioning the policies and the culture of the opposing countries or through promoting national pride, mass media of all types had a large role in being influential over their citizens.

International sport and more specifically the Olympic Games have the potential to be incredibly profitable for the media. In the 1972 Munich games were broadcasted on television to 98 countries and generated over 17.8 million US dollars (~\$107 million USD in 2018) worth of revenue according to the International Olympic Committee Olympic Marketing Fact File. There is a clear financial incentive for media members to report on the Olympics, as the games bring in viewers and interest from every corner of the world; allowing broadcasters and print media members alike to profit off of them more.

Sports Media has been crucial in the development for sports as an international spectacle. Before the invention of the radio, the only way to be involved in the action of a sporting event in real time was to either play, be in the stands, or read about the game afterward in a magazine or the newspaper. But as the radio, and later the television, became mainstream people who weren't top athletes or couldn't afford to be in the stands night in and night out still had an opportunity to be involved in the instant action that sports provided.(Calvert 87) Overall, broadcast media forged the future of sports consumption.

However, this does not undermine the importance of printed forms of sports media. Though broadcasting is the most direct way of viewing sports, studies have shown that there has been no decrease in the use of print media

in sports from the 1970's through the 1990's (Hussain 58). This shows how sports broadcasting is supplemental to print media. More and more people around the world were tuning into sports live, but people continued to read articles to get more in depth analysis of the statistics of the events. In order for printed sports media to stay modern and in the eyes of readers, their writing styles have transformed to include more entertainment value; that is, creating narratives for athletes and teams, glorifying rivalries, and instigating on and off field controversies in order to drum up more interest for the readers (Hussain 64).

The shift towards more entertainment value in sports media is was one of the significant factors in why sports media was so influential during the Cold War. The media seemingly glorified the rivalry between the Eastern and Western Blocs. According to author John Bale, writers would commonly discount the success of Soviet athletes. In the British magazine *Athletics World*, a photograph of a Soviet steeplechase runner shattering the 3,000 meter world record by over ten seconds was labeled *The most controversial picture of the year*, and the same article quoted the chief British track coach speculating that the hurdles in that particular race were under the regulation height of three feet (Bale 86).

Western media took many other opportunities to discount the success of Soviet athletes. This included calling a communist Georgian sprinter tying the world record a rather mysterious result. Seemingly just because these athletes were from Eastern Bloc countries, writers all throughout the west discredited the athletes achievements regardless of how jaw-dropping the results were. These writers were knowingly publishing their biased or unfair opinions of athletes for thousands and in some cases millions, of readers who then would look upon these athletes in the same way, associating their distaste for communist countries with their new suspicion of their athletes.

For the Soviets, sports were more than just a game. Athletics and fitness were engraved into the everyday of soviet citizens. According to Dr. Reet Howell, Soviet leaders believed that physically fit people were more socially productive, as well as being better prepared to protect their homeland. (137). However, Soviets also held sports to a separate, and significantly higher, standard than personal fitness.

Sports in the Soviet Union is distinct from physical education as it implies competition and the striving for better results. As sport can be used for non-sport objectives, it has been used by the Communist Party and the government in the general political indoctrination and training of the masses (Howell 138).

The Soviets were ahead of their time in regards to training athletes and preparing for international sport. Though a respectable goal to ensure a healthier country and better athletic performance in competition, western media loved to criticise their system. Ironically, many western sports writers also attributed much of the athletes success to the system and training programs that the Soviets created, not to the athletes themselves (Bale 87). Deflecting the greatness of Eastern Bloc athletes to the new and unusual systems they came out of shows again how western sports media tried to project Soviet athletes as lesser than their own.

In addition to undermining athletic performances of Soviet athletes, western writers were very particular in how they described Soviet athletes. Eastern competitors were described in ways that made they sound almost subhuman, or at the very least as lesser than western athletes. British writers for papers such as The London Guardian and The Daily Mail would regularly point out the masculinity of female Soviet athletes, and on occasion accuse them of having been injected with male hormones (Wagg 102). One front page newspaper title When the men were men¹; and so were the women (Wagg 102), when referring to Soviet athletes competing in the 1960 games in Rome. However, the same newspapers referred to British female athletes as the girl next door and other phrases for attractive normal women. The choice language when referring to Soviet athletes dehumanizes them, and in turn allows western readers to see the glorified athletes of their home countries as better and more favorable.

The battle between the east and the west carried over to the film industry as well. Though the American film industry never directly used film as propaganda unlike the Soviet Union (Shaw & Youngblood 160), there were many sports movies that came out during the Cold War era that reflected the period of time, as well as glorifying the rivalry between the America and the Soviet Union. Rocky IV, the highest selling Cold War film of all time, was centered around a boxing match between Italian-American boxer Rocky Balboa, versus a Soviet boxer named Ivan

Drago. Rocky, played by Sylvester Stallone, was a fictional heavyweight champion boxer whose best friend Apollo Creed, the former heavyweight boxing champion of the world, died in ring in a exhibition bout against up and coming Soviet boxer Ivan Drago. Ivan showed no remorse and in a rather cold response said If he dies, he dies (Rocky IV). This portrayed the idea that Soviets are emotionless killing machines, and have no remorse towards American lives.

Rocky decides to avenge his friend, he will participate in a 15-round unsanctioned match against Drago on Christmas Day.. Throughout the movie, Drago, played by Dolph Lundgren, was shown using high tech-training methods, steroid or other performance-enhancing drug regimen, and teams of doctors and trainers. Rocky however, trained using his normal conventional methods and hard work. This highlighted the suspicion that Soviet Athletes would cheat in international sport, and in turn praised Rocky for his old-fashioned training methods, reflecting the American idea that honest, hard work will prevail in the best traditions of Benjamin Franklin (166).

In the end, Rocky squares off against Drago, and both boxers fight a brutal match until Rocky defeats Drago by knockout in the 13th round. By then most of the spectators in attendance supported Rocky and the excitement of the fight in general. In what can only be seen as the classic good triumphing over evil (Shaw & Youngblood), Rocky then speaks to the surprisingly thrilled Soviet crowd about how everyone can change, signifying hopes of the Cold War ending. The movie ends when the Soviet general stands up and starts applauding Rocky, and then Rocky wishes his son at home a merry Christmas.

Throughout Rocky IV, there was a clear tension between the Soviet Union and America. The whole movie portrays the USSR as the villain, and Philadelphia-born Rocky as the American hero going to avenge his friend in enemy territory. Up until the end this movie framed the Soviets as the bad guys, and portrayed the common stereotypes of Soviets that western media always had. However, at the end of the movie during Rocky's speech about change, it showed that as the war was winding down (Rocky IV debuted in 1985), people wished for the conflict to resolve. This was an interesting viewpoint on the Cold War, as it clearly showed the Soviet Union as enemies, but also showed a desire for the Cold War to end. This reflected the sentiment of much of the western

media at the time, and the Cold War ended up wrapping up less than six years later, when the Soviet Union finally collapsed in 1991.

A lot of other US sports movies used a concept called soft propaganda (162), which was a strategy in which filmmakers mixed positive subliminal messages into films that which people didn't notice were directly political. Sports movies in the early 1950's and 60's integrate the relationship between family, teamwork, the military, and traditional American values (163). Movies such as *The Long Gray Line* exemplified this. In the film, a dishwasher/athletic trainer from the West Point military academy earns the respect of the cadets. He and his wife took them under their wings and taught them the codes of honor, patriotism, and manliness on the football field and in the swimming pool (164). By using soft propaganda and associating American sports with traditional American values, it helped make people feel more patriotic and more closely associated their fandom of sports with their patriotism.

Throughout the Cold War, all forms of sports media, whether printed, televised, or on the silver screen, anti-communist, and more specifically anti-Soviet, sentiment was expressed. Sports media played a major role and classifying the the east and the west as rivals. As trends in news shifted, and more entertainment value was demanded in media by the public, these rivalries carried massive financial incentive to the media. By, using the political and ideological battles between the communist Eastern Bloc and the Western Bloc western sports media turned that animosity towards athletics. This lead to sports writers, filmmakers, and broadcasters forming strong pro-west and anti-Soviet bias. This bias helped influence millions of people worldwide and helped create a bigger divide between the East and Western Blocs.

In conclusion, the influence of western sports media was greatly significant in maintaining the animosity of the east and the west in the Cold War.