THE NORDIC MEDIA
AND THE COLD WAR

Edited by
Henrik G. Bastiansen & Rolf Werenskjold

NORDICOM
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Preface

This volume is one of the outcomes of the "Media and the Cold War" project
at Volda University College, Norway, and its collaboration with several Norwegian,
Danish, Swedish and Finnish scholars. The project is linked to the international project Nuclear Crisis at the Universities of Heidelberg and Augsburg.
The relationship between Nordic media and the Cold War was the subject of a Temporary Working group during the Nordic conference for Media and Com-

munication Research in Oslo, in August 2013. The editors of this book led the
group, during which a number of papers with new studies were presented,
many of them published here, but we have also included contributions from
other researchers. In total, we are publishing 17 articles that shed new light
on Nordic media during the Cold War.

The editors would like to thank all the authors for their contributions and
for their patience as the preparation of the book took more time than expected.
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Volda, April 2015

Henrik G. Bastiansen and Rolf Werenshjeld
Chapter 8

Political Resistance on Ice

The 1969 Ice Hockey World Championship in the Swedish and Norwegian Press

Peter Dahlén & Tobias Stark

Abstract
This article examines the representation of the highly politically charged matches between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union in the 1969 Ice Hockey World Championship in the two Swedish and Norwegian subscription broadsheets Dagens Nyheter and Aftenposten. The aim is to discuss the role of ice hockey and the sports media in the staging of international politics. These two matches illustrate that rather than merely seeing the Cold War as a political struggle between ‘the East’ and ‘the West’, we here argue that the Cold War must be understood as a global phenomenon with a multitude of meanings and without fixed geopolitical boundaries.

Keywords: Cold War, ice hockey, world championships, Sweden, Norway, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union

"It started with an uprising, but it ended with a hockey game." This is the introduction to Tal Pinchevsky’s (2012) book Breakaway: From Behind the Iron Curtain to the NHL – The Untold Story of Hockey’s Great Escapes. Pinchevsky writes about hockey players from Eastern Europe who had defected to the West in search of a better life in North America with the National Hockey League (NHL) (Pinchevsky 2012:1). The particular hockey game that Pinchevsky refers to in the quote above is the politically highly charged match between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union in the Ice Hockey World Championships on March 21, 1969 in Stockholm, Sweden. The match was "inaugurably the single most important sporting event in [Czechoslovakia’s] history", Pinchevsky claims (2012:5). Even the Director of Information of the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF), Szymon Szemberg, has characterised the matches as the "most emotionally charged two games in the history of hockey" (quoted in Szemberg 2007).

The purpose of this article is to analyse the portrayal of the politically highly charged matches between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union in the 1969 Ice Hockey World Championships, as reported in the largest Swedish and No-
The Historical and Contextual Framing of the Two Matches

The events leading up to the extremely tense atmosphere surrounding the first match between the two teams on March 21, 1969, started the year before, in the morning of August 21, 1968, when the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia. Alexander Dubček had been elected the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia a mere six months earlier. Dubček initiated what came to be termed the Prague Spring, referring to the comprehensive changes in Czechoslovakia, including freedom of the press, the abolition of censorship, and the rehabilitation of citizens who had been unjustly persecuted during the 1950s (Pinchevsky 2012:3). This process came to a brutal halt when some 500 Soviet tanks rolled into the country: "In total, 27 divisions, including 5,000 armoured vehicles and 800 aircraft coming from the Soviet Union, East Germany, Poland, and Hungary, swept through the country in a single day. Czech military were ordered to avoid armed resistance, and all of Czechoslovakia was overtaken within 24 hours. The Prague Spring had effectively been crushed" (Pinchevsky 2012:2). The invasion left 25 people killed, 431 seriously wounded, and left countless buildings damaged by gunfire (Pinchevsky 2012:4).

Within days, the Soviets had formally established an occupational presence throughout Czechoslovakia that quashed numerous civil liberties and that would remain, undisturbed for the most part, for the next 20 years. An overwhelming display of resistance against the Soviets came seven months later, writes Pinchevsky: "The demonstrations in March 1969 remain to this day among the most revered moments in Czechoslovakian history. It was a historic moment inspired by, of all things, two hockey games" (2012:3-4).

The 1969 Ice Hockey World Championships were held in Stockholm as an unfortunate by-product of the occupation: Originally scheduled to be held in Czechoslovakia for the first time in a decade and on the occasion of the Czechoslovakian Ice Hockey Federation turning 60, the annual international tournament was forced to relocate to Stockholm in the wake of the invasion.

When Czechoslovakia was named host of the 1969 World Cup tournament at the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) Congress in Vienna, 1967, Sweden was posted as a backup in case Czechoslovakia would pull out. Sweden's interest in hosting the tournament appears to have been more of an act of impulse than a calculation of a possible Czechoslovakian withdrawal. At least this is the impression given by the then Vice Chairman of the Swedish Ice Hockey Federation, Rudolf "Rö" Eldow, who was also a sports journalist and editor in DN. At the Vienna conference, Eldow secured Sweden's election as reserve host with the aid of the President of the Swedish Ice Hockey Association, Helge Berglund (Ärets ishockey 1969).

Although the people in Czechoslovakia could not attend the games in Sweden, they were still able to cheer for their national team in front of their television sets. Pinchevsky quotes David Lukšu, sports reporter on Czech television and an author of multiple books on Czechoslovakian hockey: "It was like a new chance for the whole republic. Hockey is the Czech national sport" (2012:4). Pinchevsky continues:

After Canada had dominated international hockey for three decades, the Soviet Union wrested away the championship mantle by 1969, winning the two previous Olympic gold medals, as well as four consecutive World Championships. By the time Czechoslovakia faced the mighty Soviets in Stockholm on March 21, 1969, the entire nation was riveted by a match that could hopefully salvage some sense of national pride following its squashed rebellion (2012:4-5).

Pinchevsky recounts how Dubček, who still served as First Secretary after his release from detention, commented on that game years later, recalling: "The whole country watched [on TV] as Czechoslovakia played the Soviets; it was much more than ice hockey, of course. It was a replay of a lost war" (2012:5). Czechoslovakia won the match 2-0:

Finally, after months of feeling as if the Soviet republic had been stepping on their collective neck, Czechoslovaks could enjoy a remarkable, if fleeting, victory over the Soviet Union. When the siren sounded, both teams ignored the customary handshake that traditionally followed games at the World Championships. Years later, team captain Jozef Golonka was quoted as saying, "We said to ourselves, even if we have to die on the ice, we have to beat them" (Pinchevsky 2012:6).

In the Soviet Union, the TV coverage was cut immediately after the final blow of the whistle, but the rest of the world could watch the emotional closing ceremony, with the playing of the Czechoslovakian national anthem and the hoisting of the flag.

The Czechoslovakian team repeated their victory a week later, a 4-3 win, and appeared to be heading for gold in the tournament. However, Czechoslovakia's
two losses against Sweden meant that the Soviet Union defended their world title, while the silver medal went to Sweden, and the bronze medal to Czechoslovakia. The World Championships was at this time an amateur tournament. Consequently, Canada could not make use of their professional players, and pulled out of the tournament. The irony here is that the Soviet players were real professionals, paid by the state to play full time, year round.

According to Pinchevsky, "the awesome energy" that the second victory over the Soviet Union sparked in Czechoslovakia was captured days later in a *Times Magazine* article which stated: "Overcome by a vicarious sense of triumph, a huge and excited crowd swarmed into Prague's Wenceslas Square. One happy hockey fan carried a poster that read BREZHEV 3, DUBČEK 4. The crowd chanted, 'We've beaten you this time!' Someone shouted, 'The Russian coach will go to Siberia!'" (2012:7). Pinchevsky also describes how veteran television announcer Milena Vistrakova on Czechoslovak state television was unable to contain her excitement of her country’s victory over the Soviets: "Normally, I drink herbal tea, but today I will toast our hockey players with wine. Because this is not only a victory in sports, but also a moral one", Vistrakova said – and for these comments she was abruptly banned from television (2012:7).

There is no doubt that Vistrakova's comments reflected the sentiment of a proud nation whose population flooded the streets in celebration. A reported half a million Czechoslovakian citizens took to the streets in a celebration that quickly transformed into something else:

Starting out as nationwide festivities, the mammoth gathering soon took a more violent turn. Within minutes of the final horn sounding on the 4-3 win, Czechoslovakian citizens stormed the streets in droves, making sure to target any and all representations of the Soviet occupation. The same *Time* article describes a brick being smashed through the plate-glass window of the office of the Soviet airline, Aeroflot I... (Pinchevsky 2012:8).

Furthermore, in Bratislava, thousands of citizens stormed the streets with signs that read "Occupiers", "Fascists" and "Brezhnev is a hooligan" (Pinchevsky 2012:8). Similar demonstrations took place even in other Czechoslovakian cities. The Soviet Union, the occupation power, saw the demonstrations as a counter-revolutionary threat, and wanted to curb the reformist movement once and for all. Dubček was forced to resign, and with that, the democratization movement in Czechoslovakia was over. "But the power of sport and its innate ability to unite people and perhaps plant a seed for eventual political change wasn’t lost", argues Pinchevsky: "For the next 20 years, hockey players in Eastern Europe would look to this unique precedent in utilizing their on-ice talents to overcome the restrictions placed on them by the Communist state" (2012: 8-9). The two victories over the Soviet Union in the 1969 Ice Hockey World Championships were thus of great symbolic significance to the Czechoslovakian people.

Robert E. Rinehart (2007) has studied a similar event, more specifically how the Cold War rhetoric in sports was staged during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, and the Melbourne Summer Olympics shortly thereafter in November – December 1956, where Hungary won over the Soviet Union in a fierce and legendary water polo match. The Olympic water polo victory served, argues Rinehart, to congeal, if not a whole nation embroiled in life and death, then at least the Hungarian refugees and athletes:

At minimum, as a form of political resistance, the Soviet-Hungarian water polo match became a fragment for Hungarian collective memory, a tiny taste of satisfaction for Free Hungarians in Australia and for soon-to-defect athletes. The water polo victory largely became an *indirect* icon for the revolutionary movement, and a symbolic sign of resistance to 'those butchers', the heretofore 'physically dominant' Soviet Union (2007:56).

According to Rinehart, national identity may crystallize around a highly charged moment. Clearly, this match was a crystallization of national identity for Hungarians during the time of the 1956 Summer Olympics – it was a match that provided symbolic resistance to the Soviet occupation:

The Hungarian water polo team's victory over the Soviet Union and its nearly anti-climactic garnering of the gold medal at the Melbourne Olympics demonstrated more than a simple victory of a proud and capable water polo team. It contained symbolic messages. The victory, and the context surrounding it, restated to the world that the politically significant terrain of sport still nourishes forms of resistance (Rinehart 2007:45-46, 56).

Political resistance in sport may emerge, claims Rinehart, "when a group feels that a sporting event can be used as an effective tool for political change. There may be planned or spontaneous political resistance: the key element is the attempt at effecting change" (2007:47). As the revolution had been crushed by the force of the Soviet Union, words and opinion were the last resort, and the 1956 Melbourne Olympics "created high visibility and opportunity for Hungarian athletes, which meant that their participation and subsequent victories could form oppositional signs of political resistance to the Soviet regime in Hungary" (Rinehart 2007:55). In the same way that hockey is a national sport in Czechoslovakia, Hungary has a long and successful tradition in water polo, and "much of the antecedents to the water polo match between the Soviet Union and Hungary created and intensified the symbolic nature of sports contests from [being] representative of national pride to instilling national pride" (Rinehart 2007:45). The game's intensity was downplayed in the press and in later historical reports, however – perhaps in part because the Australian media were interested in putting on a good show at their Olympics (Rinehart 2007:54). Nonetheless, photographs of the
successful Hungarian water polo teams clearly show the players' feelings, Rinehart claims.

The Hungarian water polo gold medal teams (1932, 1936, 1952) are portrayed as bemusedly jubilant, smiling, cocky, arrogantly intense, and confident. In the photograph of the 1956 Hungarian gold medal winners, team members hold their medals unsmilingly. In fact, one player has his head bowed, while two others look extremely pensive. The mood of the team is reflective of the inner turmoil they are feeling (2007:50).

Similarly, it is possible to interpret the Czechoslovakian players' faces in the press photographs and in television broadcasts of the hockey games against the Soviet Union in the 1969 World Cup, when they, as the winning team, listen to their national anthem after the match.

How then, was the tournament depicted in the newspapers under scrutiny here?

The Tournament and the Swedish Media

It was not at all evident that Sweden could muster the required resources to take over the hosting of the Championships. A mere half a year was available for the preparations. The Swedish Ice Hockey Association first attempted to secure the financial standing of the tournament. Negotiations were initiated with the Swedish Radio/TV regarding compensation for the expected loss of audience in the stadiums due to the radio and television broadcasts. Further negotiations were opened with the City of Stockholm, rent cuts during the championships, and possible sponsors were sought through advertising agents. Here, Helge Berghqvist's wide network came in handy: not only was he the President of the Swedish Ice Hockey Association, he was also a leading politician in the Municipality of Stockholm and a prominent member of Sweden's largest political party, the Social Democrats, currently in government.

Furthermore, it was necessary to raise support for the event inside Sweden. Here Eklöw could take advantage of his position as a sports journalist with DN. He began publishing enthusiastic articles in the newspaper about the upcoming World Cup event. Slowly but surely this helped increase the enthusiasm for the tournament around the country. Eklöw's colleagues in other newspapers soon followed suit. They managed to muster considerable interest in Sweden: around 200,000 tickets for the games were sold, while several million people out of a population of approximately 8 million followed the games on TV and radio (Årets ishockey 1969:16).

Sweden merely had one TV channel at that time, the public service broadcaster Swedish Television (SVT). Six matches were broadcast live, and the colour broadcasts required rebuilding of the lighting facilities at the Ice Hockey Stadium: four new colour television cameras were purchased by the SVT, and a "slow motion" machine was hired (Reimer 2002:96). The television coverage of the games attracted a large audience. Seventy four per cent of the population watched the match between Sweden and the Soviet Union, which remains one of the highest audience figures ever recorded for a TV broadcast in Sweden.

The first match between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union on March 21, 1969, went live on Swedish television, as it did in Czechoslovakia and other countries. Viewers could hear a group of Czechoslovakians in the stands chanting, "Revenge for August '68". However, the anti-Soviet placards in the stadium were not visible in the TV images from the match, in accordance with a decision by the producer Lennart Jelbe (Reimer 2002:96). No tapes of the first match between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union were saved, however (Lind 2014). Because the videotapes were so expensive at that time, a number of tapes were re-used in order to cut costs. Due to the soaring inventory costs, many tapes were even scrapped. Despite this, some sections from the second match between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union have been saved.3

The Swedish Portrayal of the Tournament

In the spring of 2013, news broke that the Swedish newspaper DN was paid by the CIA to spread anti-communist propaganda during the 1950s and 1960s. With that in mind, and the knowledge of the significance of the Cold War for the development of international ice hockey in the post-war era, one might suspect that DN's reporting from the 1969 World Championships was saturated with fervent anti-Soviet tracts or impassioned cries for the benefits of liberal democracy as a way of life. However, that was not the case. The great geopolitical tensions of the time were certainly a recurrent theme in the media reporting of the tournament, but the main focus of the writers seems to have been on the games qua sporting contests, as well as on the players and coaches as competitors, sport stars and human beings. This was primarily the case with the Swedish ones, and at least in the beginning. In fact, judging by the topics in the reporting during the first week of the tournament, the Swedish reporters were at first mostly concerned with the question of Team Sweden's chance for a high position in the standings.5

At that stage, the Cold War rivalries in the reporting only surfaced in passing, when the issue was "forced upon" the writer. This can be seen when Team Czechoslovakia appeared for their first game, wearing jerseys with the old coat of arms rather than the "expected" abbreviation CSSR. DN explained this with reference to an anonymous Czechoslovakian source, stating that "black home
the folks nowadays read the letters as Czechoslovak Republic [...]. Hence, you can understand that we chose the coat of arms instead" (March 16, 1969).

A couple of days later, March 20, the paper acknowledged that Team USSR received their first "neutral" greetings in the tournament, when the whole youth section of the arena greeted their impressive 6-1 routing of Team Finland with incessant cheers and CCCP-banners. This in turn attracted the attention of "Russian newsread photographers who rushed there to take pictures", DN reported.6 However, as the World Championships progressed, and the fierce matches between Team Czechoslovakia and Team USSR became the focal point of the international ice hockey fraternity, the ramifications of the Cold War came to permeate most of the news coverage in DN. Rather than explicitly discussing the importance of the tense political situation for the ice hockey games, the reporters tended to downplay the hostility by portraying it as little more than conventional sporting competitiveness. This can be seen in the editorial "Czech optimism: We must defeat the Russians!", published on March 20, the same day as the first game between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. In this editorial, the Czechoslovakian star player Josef Cerny is quoted as saying: "A victory over the Soviet Union is what we are longing for most of all! [...] Nothing is lost yet, but if we are going to stand a chance of conquering the gold medal, we must win tonight. And I believe we are in a great place to do so."

This is a noteworthy way of portraying the situation, given that it tones down the cutthroat actions on the ice, labelling them as little more than regular athletic competitiveness, as it is the quest for the gold medals that is depicted as the driving force, not the geopolitical tensions in question. Still, it could be argued that the reporters did not have to mention the events in Prague, as the readers could hardly avoid connecting the events themselves.

Besides, there are more than a few paragraphs where the reporters are addressing the significance of the tense political situation in Eastern Europe for the Czechoslovakian and Soviet players. For example, the day following Team CSSR's 2-0 victory in the first game against Team USSR, Thorwald Olsson wrote: "And what was the heroes' first comment afterwards? Well, 'finally the first victory since August!' They were of course referring to the Soviet invasion in August.7 Olsson continued the topic the following day, citing the political aspects of the massive celebrations of the Czechoslovakian players after the match. He elaborated on the festivities, before asking the President of the Czechoslovakian Ice Hockey Association, Dr. Cervenka, for his take on the connection between sport and politics. Dr. Cervenka replied: "It is a more or less natural position for us with the situation being as it is."

The paper also ran stories on how first "the thriller" game between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia helped the organizers sell out all the tickets for the second game, and how this would benefit the Swedish youth ice hockey programme with hard cash.8 The great anticipation of the second game even translated into a first page report the day after the matchup, with the ostentatious headline "Prague explodes in happiness over the victory". The anonymous writer stated that the whole of Czechoslovakia exploded in a victory-intoxicated roar when the final buzzer went off in the game between the Czechs and the Soviets [...], the Vaclav Square in Prague instantly turned into a vortex of tens of thousands of people celebrating the triumph: 4-3. A cheer started chanting "for August, for August". Hundreds of young people blew in hunting horns, and taxis and civilian cars drove slowly through the crowds with howling horns. A police car equipped with speakers joined in the tributes and showed no signs of wanting to intervene to restore order to the traffic.9

In the sport section the same day, the paper dissected the game, stating that the Czechoslovakian players "had played more than 100 % of their capacity" in order to beat their opponent. The paper further saluted the fact that "the little brother had pinched the big brother".10 A couple of days later, the paper lamented that "one cries with the Czechs" as their two heroic victories over Team USSR were not sufficient for them to secure the gold medals.11 However, arguing that this coverage meant that DN dwelled on the topic of the Cold War in its reporting on the 1969 World Championships would be an overstatement. Rather, it is important to note that the paper – at least the sport editor-in-chief, Rudolf Eklöw – repeatedly went out of their way to trivialize the tournaments' implications as a Cold War battleground, stating that the most crucial thing about the games between the Czechoslovakians and the Soviets was neither the hostility on the ice, nor the massive celebrations in Czechoslovakia after Team CSSR had beaten Team USSR, but that the players actually came to face each other.12 A telling example of this take on the matter is Rudolf Eklöw's résumé in DN of the World Championships on March 31: "As far as I'm concerned, the most crucial thing of this tournament was that the Soviet and Czech sporting-peers could actually face one another on the ice without too much hullabalo. That the teams did not greet each other after the bout should be regarded as a mere trifle."

All in all, however, DN's way of downplaying the Cold War rivalries might not be all that surprising, given the conventional notion that sports and politics must be kept apart among fans and sports people alike. It is also possible that Eklöw's position as the Vice President of the Swedish Ice Hockey Association contributed, as the organizers undoubtedly did everything in their power to keep the political turmoil from overshadowing the sporting contest. Moreover, this take on the matter also tied in well with the Swedish national identity and the international policy of the Swedish government at the time, with its emphasis on neutrality and striving for international reconciliation (Stark 2010: 225-228, 236, 271).
The Norwegian Portrayal of the Tournament

In 1969, *Aftenposten* was published six days a week, save for Sundays. All in all, the reporting from the tournament by Norway's largest broadsheet was fairly detailed. The first day of the tournament, March 15, *Aftenposten* had an article on the welcome reception in the City Hall the day before, and on the friendly welcome everyone received in Stockholm. The paper even highlighted that this was the first time that computer technology was used in the press section. A major article saw the tournament from a purely competitive point of view, with an assessment of the opposing teams' chances of success in the championships. In particular, it focused on the charged matches between the neighboring countries Sweden and Finland. Political aspects of the matches between Czechoslovakia, the USSR, Canada and the United States were not mentioned. Instead, the focus was on the traditional differences in style between the elegant play of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union on the one hand, and the more physically raw Canadians. *Aftenposten* even mentioned that Czechoslovakia imitated the Soviet tactics of strengthening the team with physically strong players to be able to hold sway against Canada. Thus, *Aftenposten* did not distinguish between Czechoslovakia and USSR, but between the more fair-playing, and, when it comes to behaviour in the rink, the more civilized national teams from Eastern Europe on the one hand, and the more brutal Canadian team on the other.

Almost halfway into the tournament, a big *Aftenposten* headline on 21 March claimed that "Soviet-Czechoslovakia becomes Ice Hockey World Championship's climax", and that everybody were now looking forward to that particular match. In a follow-up article further down the page, titled "Czechs have the most minutes in the penalty box of all the teams", *Aftenposten* noted that the Czechoslovakian seemed to have moved away from their role as the gentlemen of the rink. Czechoslovakia was the only team that had two men sent off the rink for unsportsmanlike conduct, Josef Golonka and Jan Suchy.

Moreover, it was not far from that Jaroslav Holík, accidentally, put a hard right fist on the American referee Tromble when he happened to run into his hockey stick. Holík was bleeding, threw off the helmet and spat towards the referee. The Czechoslovakian team claims that the judge stole the victory from them against Sweden. - We have never had such weak referees, said Holík. The weakest was that they expelled Holík for ten minutes for having spat after them i.e. the referee, says Dagens Nybeter.

Here, it appears as if the Czechoslovakian team is behaving as poor sports and bad losers. *Aftenposten* made no independent assessment of the Czechoslovakian behaviour, but left it to the Swedish newspaper *DN*, in which Holík, rather than the referee, was regarded as the culprit. One may ask why *Aftenposten* did not want to or dare perform an independent evaluation of the Czechoslovakians' behaviour. Those who read the article, however, could choose whether to interpret the Czechoslovakians' behaviour and the ensuing penalty minutes as something negative or positive. Perhaps some readers saw this as evidence of how incredibly loaded the Czechoslovakians were in this tournament, how focused they were on winning - not allowing the Soviet Union to do so.

On March 29, the day after Czechoslovakia's second victory over the Soviet Union in the tournament, *Aftenposten* reported under the headline "Euphoria in Prague after 4-3" of great rejoicing in Czechoslovakia: "Delightful demonstrations after hockey victory 4-3 over the Soviet Union erupted in Prague last night." The photo [by AP] was taken on Wenceslas Square, which the year before had been the centre of the many dramatic events after the Soviet invasion. The accompanying picture, at the top of the page, showed the large crowd at the Wenceslas Square. This is no insignificant place: Wenceslas Square is the centre of the business and cultural communities in the New Town of Prague. Many historical events occurred there, and it is a traditional setting for demonstrations, celebrations, and other public gatherings. The square is named after Saint Wenceslas, the patron saint of Bohemia. It is part of the historic centre of Prague, today a World Heritage Site. This photograph was therefore of great symbolic value for those who knew the historical significance of the Wenceslas Square. To further underscore the great political significance of the event, the article was published in the section for international news, rather than on the sports page.

On the sports page in *Aftenposten* on the same day, 29 March, however, Leif K. Nilsen comments on Czechoslovakia's 4-3 win that it was a match "with no black spots. It was fair from the first to the last minute, and although it would occasionally flash and sparkle in the eyes of both Czechs and Russians, there were never any foul play. But two Russian hockey defeats against Czechoslovakia is a tremendous loss of prestige for Russia - for several reasons." Here, Nilsen tried to downplay what he claimed many newspapers anticipated would be a "fate encounter" between the two national teams, and that the first game between the teams was not marked by hatred. There had been some rumours that there would be "policemen everywhere in the stands" throughout the match, something Nilsen considered to be "quite unnecessary after the first showdown between the Czechs and the Russians".

However, there was no guarantee of what might happen, said Nilsen, since "the Russian leadership claims that the hockey association's leader Helge Berglund and Rudolf Eckow have not kept their promise that the Soviet team would get treatment on par with the others in this tournament". According to Nilsen, the Russians "complained that the hosts did not halt the protests against them. The Russians were also upset that the audience in the stands were allowed to display their placards "attacking the Soviet Union". It is claimed, that it must have been an attempt to satisfy the Russians that both uniformed and plain
clothes’ police remained in the stands during the match as additional safety measures, which turned out not to be necessary, Nilsen concluded.

Nilsen then continued quoting an article in the Swedish DN, arguing that the complex situation had prompted the Russians to state that they would “sweep the Czechs off the ice”. Further, Nilsen criticised DN and Swedish sports journalism, arguing that “whether you can trust that it is properly quoted in the Swedish sports press, which is not always so careful about what they retell”. The Russians had, on their part, received orders for fair play, not allowing themselves to be provoked, but rather let the Czechs reveal themselves with unpleasant prank”. Nilsen commented as follows: “We [i.e. Aftenposten] do not understand that it would have been any grounds for suggesting such a thing: although the Czechs have had too many penalties, they have, after all, never played unsympathetically.”

Nilsen then continued with a detailed description of the match in question. The fact that he touched on so many aspects of the tensions surrounding the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia’s national teams is an indication that the Cold War had an impact here too, that it was debated.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have shown how sports journalism can become an arena not only for sporting competition, but also for the channelling of large political tensions and conflicts. Two large broadsheet papers have been studied: The Swedish DN (Dagens Nyheter/The Daily News) and the Norwegian Aftenposten (The Evening News), both conservative newspapers. Our case study consisted of the 1969 Ice Hockey World Championship, the year after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and the so-called Prague Spring of 1968. We have shown that the Cold War was thematised and debated in the sports pages. By the same token, the World Cup tournament was even covered in the section for international news, with a focus on the conflict between the two countries, and the war-like situation that was taking place.

The two matches that occurred after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia received special attention in the media. Most people hoped, naturally, that the Czechoslovaks would win over their “occupiers”, as this would have great symbolic value and in a way degrade the occupying force, the USSR. However, the sports journalists in the two newspapers studied attempted to remain neutral in their reporting of the matches between the USSR and Czechoslovakia. Furthermore, they seemed to regard the matches as pure sports competitions alongside the political conflicts unfolding outside the rink. This is in line with the sports movement’s attempt to separate sport and politics, and something that is particularly noticeable in the DN coverage. The reason for this may be

that DN’s sports editor, Rudolf “R: et” Eldow, also served on the Board of the Swedish Ice Hockey Association and was a major contributor to securing the Ice Hockey World Championships to Sweden after Czechoslovakia withdrew due to the Soviet invasion. There was a special interest from the Association’s side to keep the political conflicts outside of the tournament, in order not to offend any of the participating countries. The fact that Sweden was a neutral country, and not a member of NATO, may be significant in this regard, as well as the Social Democratic government of the day.

However, it was inevitable that the Cold War and the conflict between Czechoslovakia and the USSR broke through DN’s reporting from the tournament. The Cold War seemed to have been even more visible in reporting of the Norwegian newspaper Aftenposten. Perhaps this was because Norway was not the host country and therefore did not have to take the same view of sensitive political issues as DN’s sports journalists. The fact that Norway, unlike Sweden, was a member of NATO may also have played a role here, but that was still not sufficiently visible in Aftenposten’s coverage from the tournament.

Both DN and Aftenposten seemed to agree, however, that for Czechoslovakia beating the Soviet Union was more than defeating another team; it was defying their occupants.

Notes

1. They could probably also follow the game by radio
2. A second SYV channel was launched in December 1969
6. Bo Melander, DN
7. DN, February 22, 1969
10. DN, March 29, 1969
12. See Bucky Byström, DN, March 31, 1969; Sören Levelefs, DN, March 31, 1969

References


Årets ishockey (This year's ice hockey) 1969.