Introduction

The trend of our times is the increasing role of sports in international relations, which, according to Nelson Mandela, is the most effective means of communication in the modern world. Studies on the role of sports have occupied a strong place in Soviet-Russian science of international relations almost since the beginning of the 20th century. This is not surprising because Russia, especially during the Soviet period of its history, was proud of sporting successes. Despite the doping scandals that have swept the country over the past few years, Russia is striving to regain the status of a world sports power, making a lot of efforts for this: organizational, intellectual, financial, and diplomatic. These circumstances led to significant interest among Russian scholars in analyzing the possibilities of sports in international relations.

Notwithstanding this interest, there is practically no serious analysis of scientific schools and approaches to the study of sports as part of international relations in Russian science. There are no generalizing works on this issue. The most complete review of the Russian historiography of sports in international relations was undertaken by V. Stolyarov, A. Sunik, and M. Oreshkin in the late 1990s and early 2000s and reflected the most important issues reviewed by Soviet-Russian scholars writing on this issue. However, they did not seek to assess the state of sports research in the system of international relations as a separate scientific discipline, so we have to admit that this issue remains poorly studied. This section is an attempt to fill this gap.

Formation and Development of Sports Research in International Relations in the USSR

In the first years of Soviet authority, sports were already highly appreciated by the government of the country, not only as a means of physical preparation of youth but also as an instrument for propagating the ideas of the proletarian revolution. After 1917, Soviet Russia could participate in international sports relations only through the working sports movement and Red Sports International, created in 1921 in Moscow with the aim of uniting the left wing of international sports. The active inclusion of Soviet Russia in the activities of Red Sports, in turn, served as a starting point for the beginning of the study of sports relations. At this time, the first works of Soviet authors on sports appeared, laying the foundation for further study of the sports
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component of international relations. Their main goal was not so much to study the international movement of workers-athletes as to disseminate the ideas of the struggle for the rights of workers through sports, which was seen as a form of class struggle, internationalism, and solidarity. This was written about in 20 or 30 years of the 20th century by Nikolai Podvoysky, Pavel Pavlov, Efim Kaplan, and Ivan Zholdak.

Despite the bias, these works are important for understanding the origins of Russian studies of international sports in the future as they first raised the question of the possibility of using sports in the interests of foreign policy and diplomacy.

The first serious studies of the interaction of sports and international relations began to appear in the mid-20th century. There were certain reasons for this. After the end of the Second World War, the conditions for the full inclusion of the Soviet Union in the International Olympic Movement were being created. In 1951, the USSR National Olympic Committee was created; in 1952, the Soviet team made its Olympic debut in Helsinki. After a long break, Soviet athletes began to take part in international competitions and gain victories. This served as a powerful catalyst for the development of the interest of Soviet scholars in international sports relations and required their deep analysis.

The Russian school of sports research in international relations, originating in the era of the Cold War and developing as the USSR’s sports relations intensified, reflected the political characteristics of its time, absorbed the basic tenets of Soviet ideology, and served as the basis for the foreign policy actions of the Soviet government. The increase in bloc confrontation and the arms race led to an intensification of the struggle between Soviet athletes and athletes from capitalist countries. The processes of politicization have noticeably intensified in sports, which could not but affect the nature of Soviet studies of international sports relations until the collapse of the USSR.

A distinctive feature of the Soviet historiography of the Cold War era was significant attention to the anti-war potential of sports – a kind of response to the intensification of the political confrontation in sports arenas. This approach was formed against the backdrop of the rapid development of the international movement of progressive forces for peace in the 1950s and 60s. Many international competitions were held under the motto “For Peace and Friendship Between Peoples”: the multi-day bicycle racing of the world (1948), the international rally “For Peace and Friendship” (1960), etc. In 1973, the International Olympic Committee devoted the 10th Olympic Congress to the issue of sports in the service of peace.

Following the line of Soviet anti-war rhetoric, Soviet scholars argued that sports are an “ambassador of peace,” a bridge of friendship between peoples, and a symbol of peaceful and fair rivalry. This view was largely based on the ideas of the founding father of the modern Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin, who believed that “together with sports, a new and powerful support for peace is growing,” as well as the fundamental principles of the Olympic Charter, which proclaimed the main goal of Olympism was to “contribute to the creation of a peaceful society, carry out activities aimed at strengthening peace.”

N. Ponomarev, N. Pecherskij, and Yu. Talalaev were at the forefront of research on the peacemaking potential of sports. The most famous representative of this position, Professor N. Ponomarev, was one of the first to consider sports as the most important social phenomenon on an international scale, based on a spectacle that encompasses a large number of fans of different ages, nationalities, and beliefs. The scholar noted that “sport is an important factor in internationalism, maintaining peace and friendship between nations,” and this quality must be taken into account in the practice of international sports relations.

In assessing the peacekeeping function of sports, Soviet science as a whole relied not only on the ideological foundations of socialism and the Olympic Charter but also on the entire history
of international sports in the 20th century: it is known that the Olympics of 1916, 1940, and 1944 did not take place because of wars while peaceful periods served as the foundation for the flourishing of sports relations. However, one cannot but note the idealization of Soviet science as a complex phenomenon as a sport, the absolutization of its positive aspects, and ignoring the contradictory nature.

The achievements of the Soviet historical school of the study of sports are significant. A special role in its formation was played by Professor A. Sunik, who introduced into scientific use many interesting materials on the history of sports relations in Russia. A. Sunik revealed new facts proving that from the very beginning, Russia was at the forefront of the Olympic movement and an active participant in the emerging international sports ties.

A feature of the historical studies of sports in the USSR was a significant interest in sports relations in the 1920s and 30s. Representative of such studies are those of N. Bugrov and S. Danilov. Soviet scholars, like their predecessors, maintained a class approach to the assessment of international sports relations and saw in sports a form of political confrontation. However, unlike the works created in the first years of Soviet power, the research of the 1950s and 1980s was based on serious archival materials, had scientific value, and was not propaganda. Studying the international relations of Soviet athletes in the early years of Soviet power remains a topical subject.

A special place in Soviet science is occupied by the Olympic theme. The interest was primarily due to the success of Soviet athletes in the Olympics throughout the second half of the 20th century. The mutual boycotts of the 1980 and 1984 Olympic Games led to the fact that the Olympic theme in the writings of the Soviet scholars acquired political coloring, and they were considered from the standpoint of the confrontation of the two systems. Nevertheless, in the 1980s, a lot of research on the history of the Olympic Games, the International Olympic Committee, and Olympic traditions appeared in Soviet science. Due to their completeness and fundamental nature, these works have not lost their relevance to this day.

Summarizing the review of Soviet traditions and approaches to the study of sports through the prism of international relations, we note several features. Firstly, in the era of the Cold War, sports victories were considered in Soviet historiography as a means of demonstrating the advantages of a socialist way of life over a capitalist one. Secondly, the view of sports as a means of establishing world peace, as opposed to Western theories, which are based on the thesis of the aggressive nature of sports, has been spread in Soviet historiography. The third feature is related to the interest in the history of the international sports labor movement of the 1920s and 30s and the participation of Soviet Russia, which largely replaced studies on the general history of sports and sports relations.

Worthy of note are the one-sidedness of assessments of Soviet sport, due to the political interests of the USSR, and a certain idealization of the functions of sports as the “ambassador of the peace.” Nevertheless, Soviet science has created a solid foundation for further understanding of the role of sports in international relations.

Sports Studies in the System of International Relations in Modern Russian Science

To date, in Russian scientific discourse, the main approaches to the study of sports as a part of international relations have undergone changes in terms of issues, assessments, and methodology. New areas of research have been distinguished due to the changing geopolitical situation, the emergence of new foreign policy challenges in Russia, and changes in Russian sports. In the early 1990s, in the wake of the democratization of Russian society, a special
area of research – the “humanities of sports” – began to take shape. A special contribution to the development of the humanitarian dimension of the international sports movement was made by V. Stolyarov, who devoted more than 100 of his works to this issue. Stolyarov acts as a consistent representative of the theory, which is based on a humanistic paradigm that focuses on the approach to the study of sports as a means of “realizing humanistic ideals and values relating to personality and social relations.” The scholar takes this approach to the field of the international sports movement, seeing in it a platform for interaction between peoples and a means of improving the world.

The problem of the transformation of international sports in the context of globalization is close to the problem of humanities in sports; this was examined by Y. Yamshchikov and A. Kylasov. Representatives of this trend argue that globalization is changing the face of modern sports, enhancing its inconsistency, leading to the loss of basic moral values, and turning it into an element of mass culture. The Olympic movement as the highest manifestation of international sports comes into internal conflict with basic moral principles: equality of participants and fair competition. From a means of cooperation, sports becomes a means of competition. This is evidenced, for example, by an increase in interest in the unofficial team classification at the Olympic Games, in which the personal results of athletes are not evaluated, but the achievements of national teams. As a result, the humanistic potential of sports in international relations is being questioned. Thus, at the beginning of the 21st century, there was a departure from an unambiguously positive assessment of sports as a way to strengthen the peace, characteristic of the Soviet period, towards a more restrained, ambiguous, but more realistic assessment in Russian science.

At the beginning of the 2000s, Russian scholars A. Bugreev and A. Egorov suggested that modern sports are characterized by “constant[ly] going beyond the sports sphere.” This suggests an objective expansion of the functions of sports, including as a form of international relations. The scholars expressed the idea that, in the context of globalization, sports had entered a new phase of development, the phase of “neo-Olympism,” which is characterized by dehumanization, technology to achieve results, and victory at all costs. The scholars see two possible ways of developing international sports in the 21st century: the first one is the path from sports without violence to a world without violence; the second is the path of the dehumanization and desovereignization of sports, which can lead to “turning it into a subordinate part of politics, ideology, business, militarism, the State.”

One of the manifestations of sports in the era of “neo-Olympism” is its explicit involvement in political battles. Many powers and politicians are still trying to use sports as a rivalry instrument, as in the Cold War era. The deep penetration of politics into the world of sports has necessitated a thorough political analysis of it. Interest in the global politicization of international sports is one of the trends in Russian humanities at the beginning of the 21st century. Most Russian scholars believe that, despite the deep humanistic ideas inherent in sports, it was never free from politics and was always used, to some extent, for political purposes. Sports can serve as a way to demonstrate the success of the state, be used to increase its international prestige and to create a favorable foreign policy image, and, in some cases, becomes an instrument of exerting pressure or fomenting nationalist sentiments. Today, politics has deeply penetrated sports. It is no coincidence that many countries are actively competing for the right to host major world championships: Olympics and world and continent championships.

At the beginning of the 21st century, a stormy discussion has unfolded in Russian science about the role and functions of sports in international relations. There is no unity of opinion among scholars. M. Oreshkin, S. Barinov, and V. Stolyarov, professors at MGIMO, in the spirit of a positive assessment of sports as an instrument of international relations, especially note its
communicative, integrative, and educational functions. They are of the opinion that “sports competitions and contacts allow people of different countries to get better acquainted with the achievements of culture,”26 arouse a feeling of mutual respect, help overcome intercultural barriers, and participate in the formation of national identity. A. Bugreev, who speaks about the dual role of sports in modern international relations, offers a more restrained assessment. What this role will be depends on the goals and interests of various political forces or states.27

A critical look at the role of sports in international relations is also presented in the palette of opinions. Its supporters argue that, in modern sports, top achievements have become one of the centers of international tension and that, with the help of sports, “politicians can solve a number of political tasks, incite nationalism in their own country and ethnic conflicts in another country to destabilize the situation therein.”28

As a whole, Russian authors are not inclined to idealize sports as a means of improving international relations: along with its enormous humanistic potential, it also contains a negative component that can be used for competition and pressure. This is due to the fact that people’s love of sports can be used not only for progressive purposes but also for selfish ones: political, propaganda, nationalist.

Today, sports in the system of international relations is an extremely controversial phenomenon that cannot be unambiguously assessed. Despite the different views and assessments, we can say with confidence that in the context of globalization, sports has undergone major changes in terms of its social and international functions. It is also indisputable that under the existing conditions, sports and politics are inseparable from each other, and in the future, this trend will only intensify. This point of view is a hallmark of modern Russian studies of international sports.

One of the new but rapidly developing areas of research on the relationship between sports and international relations is the phenomenon of sports diplomacy. Sports diplomacy is usually seen in the soft power paradigm as a form of public diplomacy: for example, by S. Murray.29 There is no single approach to the definition of sports diplomacy in Russian science, but most scholars, like their Western colleagues, consider it a kind of soft power.30 S. Martynenko, the author of a number of works on this topic, calls sports diplomacy “humanitarian technology and a full-fledged civil society institution capable of solving the strategic tasks of countries in the field of domestic and foreign policy.”31 Sports diplomacy is often seen as a means of improving the image of countries in the world.32

However, sports diplomacy is not limited only to the government level but involves a very wide and democratic circle of participants. Therefore, another definition of sports diplomacy can be proposed: activities based on the use of sport as a political instrument for solving certain foreign policy goals of the state, realizing its foreign policy interests, strengthening (or sometimes worsening) diplomatic relations between the two entities.33

Despite the interest in sports diplomacy among Russian scholars, there is a definite drawback in generalizing writings containing its theoretical understanding. It can be assumed that this area of research will become very promising, and it will develop in the future, as Russia has big sports plans for the future and is ready to host many mega-sports events.

Separately, Russian studies in the field of sports nationalism, one of the most acute problems of modern sports, should be noted. For a long time, this problem was not the subject of special study in Russia, remained in the shadow of other plots, and stood out in an independent direction only at the beginning of the 21st century.34 Throughout the 20th century, sports have served as a way of representing national interests. So, during the opening of the Olympics in Stockholm in 1912, Finnish athletes refused to march under the Russian flag, declaring their right to self-determination. This trend has clearly remained in the 21st century, but now sports nationalism is increasingly aggressive: rejection by some fans of athletes with a different skin
color; the creation of ultra-radical football fan movements (for example, in Ukraine and England); and direct showdowns in stadiums, such as during a football match between the national teams of Serbia and Albania in 2016. The conflict was caused by the appearance of a drone with the provocative banner “Great Albania,” issued by the Albanians, which outraged the Serbs.

**Russian Centers for the Study of Sports in the System of International Relations**

A unique center for the study of international sports is Russian International Olympic University, established in 2009. Along with teaching, it is active in publishing: from 2013 to 2020, more than 20 books were published on sports management, the history of the Olympic movement, threats to Olympic values, etc.

In the 2000s, a school for the study of international sport and sports diplomacy was formed at the Faculty of International Relations of St. Petersburg State University. The merits of the St. Petersburg scientific school are the theoretical justification of sports diplomacy, the study of sports relations as a part of the foreign cultural policy of countries and international cultural and humanitarian cooperation, and attention to the humanitarian component of the international sports movement. Its representatives, N. Bogolyubova and Yulia Nikolaeva, wrote monographs and papers and developed courses for undergraduates.

In 2017, the first master’s program in sports diplomacy was opened at Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO). On the basis of this program, scientific conferences, roundtables, and seminars are held on a wide range of issues of sports and sports relations: for example, a master class entitled Protecting the Interests of Russian Athletes in the World Sports Arena in 2016.

Studies of sports problems in international relations are now being conducted at many Russian universities (Moscow State University, RUDN, the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA), etc.). Major research centers include Lesgaft National State University of Physical Education, Sport and Health, the oldest higher educational institution in Russia, founded in 1896; the Russian State University of Physical Culture, Sports, Youth, and Tourism in Moscow; and Volgograd State Academy of Physical Culture. The curriculum of these universities includes special courses; the master’s programs have been opened; the lecturers have published a number of scientific works in the field of the international sports movement. These examples indicate the relevance of both research in the field of sports in the system of international relations and universities that train professional personnel in this direction.

**Sports Diplomacy of Modern Russia: Problems and Prospects**

Issues of sports and sports diplomacy are extremely important for Russia. They are included in the concept of foreign cultural policy as one of the most effective means of creating a favorable image of the country. Many well-known Russian athletes have become members of state bodies and have the ability to influence decision making (for example, three-time Olympic figure skating champion Irina Rodnina and three-time Olympic wrestling champion Alexander Karelin are deputies of the State Duma of the Russian Federation). This cannot be said of representatives of the academic community studying sports as a part of international relations: their opinions are not always taken into account in the practice of making foreign policy decisions. We believe that more active involvement of scholars as experts, not only in discussing issues related to sports diplomacy but also in practical activities for its development, would increase
the efficiency of using sports instruments in the foreign policy of the Russian Federation and combine theory with practice.

Now, sports diplomacy in Russia is in a difficult situation. On the one hand, successful mega-sports events (the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, the 2018 FIFA World Cup, the 2019 Winter Universiade in Krasnoyarsk) and the high achievements of Russian athletes at major international championships (for example, figure skater Alina Zagitova is the Olympic, world, and European champion) contribute to strengthening the country’s image. On the other hand, incessant doping scandals inflicted a serious blow to Russia’s reputation and became its anti-advertisement.

Due to sanctions and doping scandals, Russia is practically deprived of the opportunity to hold sports mega-events and to have representatives in the leadership of international sports organizations on which decision making depends. This situation, of course, complicates the implementation of sports diplomacy in Russia and brings all efforts to naught.

In addition to the reasons caused by the difficult foreign policy conditions Russia is currently facing, there are also internal problems: lack of development of ideas, instruments, and financing of sports diplomacy; lack of a clear vision of the place of sports diplomacy in the overall state foreign policy; lack of a systemic nature in the work being done; and lack of specific programs and vivid international campaigns for the implementation of sports diplomacy.

Carrying out sporting mega-events is an important but clearly insufficient instrument for sports diplomacy. The institution of sports envoys among reputable athletes, who could explain Russia’s position on world sports issues, has established itself well. For example, the Russian hockey player Alexander Ovechkin, who is playing in the USA thanks to his fame, would completely cope with such duties. Specialized targeted programs can help sports diplomacy in Russia: for example, a program for sports visitors from among foreign journalists who visit the country to get acquainted with its sports achievements or a program supporting sustainable development through sports – sending “sports advisers” to countries in need. An effective form of sports diplomacy could be the promotion of Russians to key posts in international sports organizations (IOC, WADA, international sports federations). And, of course, the emergence of a specialized actor who would take full responsibility for the development and implementation of sports diplomacy would also increase its effectiveness. Now, unfortunately, there is none.

Conclusion

An analysis of the works of Russian scholars allows us to conclude that sports as an international phenomenon is studied quite deeply, and its international functions are appreciated. Scientific schools have developed in modern Russian science, a large number of monographs and papers are being published, theses are being defended, and master’s programs and research centers are being opened. At the same time, there is a lack of theoretical understanding of sports mega-events and their positive and negative consequences for the country and society; there are no serious studies on how sports can become a brand of modern Russia and what needs to be done.

As a whole, Russian science follows the general line of development of global research and responds to the same acute issues: “sport and politics,” “sport and international relations,” and “sport and globalization.” Russian sports research in international relations is quite competitive and can successfully advance to the world level. The lack of research in English is gradually becoming a thing of the past; Russian scholars actively publish their papers in prestigious foreign journals and participate in international conferences. Given the established traditions and existing developments, the Russian school could make its contribution to the development of international sports research. Uniquely, the most developed topics worthy of replenishing the
world's scientific piggy bank are research in the field of humanistic sports, serious developments in the theory and practice of sports diplomacy, and the theory of “neo-Olympism.” It can be assumed that in these areas, the development of Russian scientific schools on sports as a part of international relations will continue in the future.

Today, Russian sports come under pressure from international sanctions in connection with the accusations of some Russian athletes doping. Under these circumstances, Russia faces a very difficult but important task – regaining the opportunity to fully participate in the international sports movement and explaining to the world public its true intentions, which consist of using sports relations as a means of communication and peaceful dialogue and popularizing the best achievements of Russian culture, of which sports are a part. Russia is making efforts to create its own strategy of soft power, in which sports play the role of a means of creating a sense of self-esteem, patriotism, and national pride, rather than blackmail and pressure. It has consistently advocated minimizing the negative aspects of the use of sports in politics and international relations, considering it exclusively for peaceful dialogue and intercultural communication. The research in the area develops the humanistic essence of sports.

Notes
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