
Published by Soviet Sport to mark the 85th birthday of Professor Sunik, this volume offers a detailed, deep, versatile academic and historiographic review of the Russian and Soviet history of physical education, sport and the Olympic Movement. This publication has been keenly awaited for a long time. Sunik was the first and as it turned out the last academic in the USSR who attempted to explore and generalize the scientific legacy of Tsarist and post-revolutionary Russian history of physical education, sport and the Olympic Movement. In many of his works, he described the role of General A.D. Butovsky, the first IOC Member in Russia in the field of physical education of youth in Russia. Sunik underlined the remarkable contribution made by Butovsky in science, pedagogy, the history of physical education and organization of the Olympic Movement in Russia. His work drew great attention to Butovsky and his activities and not just in academic circles. So it was that in 1994, during the 3rd Goodwill Games in St. Petersburg, memorials dedicated to Pierre de Coubertin and Butovsky were ceremonially unveiled were stately opened at the Olympic Stadium by then IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch and Vitali Smirnov, IOC Member and President of the Russian Olympic Committee.

The foundation for Sunik's 'Essays on Domestic Historiography of Physical Education and Sport History' was his 2001 work 'Russian Sport and the Olympic Movement on the Edge of 19th and 20th Centuries'. This fundamental research was also the result of many years of his scientific work, which he finished in Ulm.
Germany, after moving there from Lvov in the Ukraine in the mid nineties. The book was published with the assistance of the Russian Olympic Committee and, in particular its honorary president Vladimir Rodichenko, Hon. President, and his colleague Alexander Kantonistov, Kontanistov, Head of the Olympic Education Department, both ISOH members.

This work is therefore a logical continuation and result of the author’s scientific and research activities. Approaching historiography as a historic discipline by means of multiple sources and reference material, Sunik places the early authors and their works in the context of history of physical education, sport and the Olympic Movement in Russia in the end of 19th – beginning of the 20th Century. In addition to the works of Butovsky, he refers to a wide variety of works by such outstanding Russian scientists, pedagogues, public persons and founders of the Russian physical education system and National Olympic Movement as Petr Lesgaft, Egor Pokrovsky and Georgy Duperron, the founder of the Russian Olympic Committee (1911), its first secretary and IOC Member for Russia (1913–1915).

The work is original and fresh, particularly in the fifth section, “Coverage Peculiarities(sic) of Physical Education and Sport History in Russian Literature in the Beginning of the 20th Century.” Here, for the first time in a domestic historiography, Sunik introduced into the scientific sphere information concerning sport promotion, Olympic Movement and physical education and, moreover, absolutely new, in majority, periodical publications and literature sources of that time. He catalogued views, concepts, theoretical preconditions of hundreds of people, some well-known before in historical literature and others hitherto completely unknown, whose works were then being published not only in Moscow and St. Petersburg, but in Kiev, Odessa, Tomsk, Warsaw (Poland was a part of the Russian Empire at that time), etc. These included such publications as Russian Sport (1882–1884, 1893–1895), Hunter (1887), Cyclist (1895–1904), Gymnastics (1903–1904), Sport (1897–1900, 1900–1916), Sport Life (1907), Sport and Science (1908–1910), Sport Review (1909), Physical Education and Sport (1910), World Sport and Health (1910–1912), In For Sports! (1912–1913, 1915–1917), Beauty and Force (1913), Sport and Games (1912–1913), Hercules (1913), Sport and Tourism Messenger (1914), etc.

From these and other publications, reports and state papers, it is possible to imagine an abundance and a variety of sources for physical education and sport in the pre-revolutionary Russia. Sunik’s ‘Essays’ also gave us some exclusive and good examples of the attitude to sport of such outstanding Russian writers as Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov.

Sunik’s monograph has drawn on a wide range of sources: periodic publications, historical literature, archive materials from the IOC Archive in Lausanne (especially the correspondence of Butovsky and Pierre de Coubertin) to Tolstoy Foundation Archive in Munich, as well as state, family, personal and private archives, conversations and interviews with outstanding sport historians and their relatives, etc.

However, the main thing is, to my mind, the author’s methodological and philosophical approach to the compilation, generalization, analysis and interpretation of all material, selection of basic things, separation of major and minor, consistent and accidental, tendencies and unique facts.

It is worth mentioning that the author’s formative years as a scientist and pedagogue were in the Soviet era where his work was constrained by the ideology of the regime. (pls. see chapters III, IV, V, VI, VII of the monograph, pages 84–524, i.e. all historiography of sport history and the Olympic Movement of the Soviet period).

Sunik, like many of his colleagues – historians of sport, Olympic Games, Olympism and the Olympic Movement – had to strictly follow the instructions and requirements of the Communist Party, whatever they might be. Then, when the Gorbachev era of Perestroika began, and then as the USSR dissolved and a new Russia appeared, new attitudes to economic and political life, culture and sport emerged. For Sunik and for many of his colleagues there was a need to re-evaluate everything that had done and written to try to give some new sense to our past life and our scientific legacy without changing basic personal and humanitarian values. (regardless of where we live and work – in Russia, Germany, Ukraine, Belarus, etc.) Sunik nonetheless remained a historian of sport, physical education and the Olympic Movement, devoted to his personal and scientific principles. He did not rush about between the future and the past. Neither did he deny his views and scientific works. In his complicated, honest and confessional manner he tried to sincerely explain things and convince his readers (mostly the young generation of Russian historians working in the field of history of physical education and sport of the 21st Century) that he had been right and objective giving his own subjective, individual and truthful description, explanation and interpretation of social and historic backgrounds. He revealed the truth, but not as a dogma. His truth was in its development, in the contradictions of history of physical education and sport as a science, subject and branch of sport science in the Tsarist Russia, the USSR and the contemporary Russia.

There is no doubt that Sunik’s monograph would be of interest not only to Russian sport historians but those in other countries. Therefore, it would be reasonable to publish it at least in English. In addition the work could form part of a related monograph – World Historiography of the History of Sport and the Olympic Movement.

*Oleg Miloshein’s doctoral thesis at the Lviv State Institute of Physical Education was The Formation and Development of the History of Physical Education as a Science in the USSR (1917–mid-1980s) at the Scientific Council of the Central State Institute of Physical Education.