THE DICTATORS DISCOVER SPORT

By John R. Tunis

The dictators have discovered sport. This was inevitable. Middle-aged and older persons have their roots in the ground, have affiliations with former régimes. The hope of the dictators, therefore, was to win over youth to the new conception of life, the new system. They found that they could best succeed through sport. From being a simple source of amusement and recreation, it became a means to an end, a weapon in the hands of the All Highest. It became nationalistic. The ideal of sport for sport's sake became an object of ridicule. The real preoccupation of those who directed athletics became the mass production of cannon fodder.

Nobody would say that in most democracies, and especially in the United States, athletics has yet reached a utopian state of perfection. But the commercialization of sport which we know affects only a relatively small number of persons in a few publicized branches of American sport. In the nations ruled by dictators, however, every boy and girl in the country is regimented and exploited.

It was not until the advent of Stalin that the far-reaching possibilities of sport as a means of influencing and controlling the young were appreciated. He it was who arranged the general scheme of sport in Russia. Mussolini adapted the Russian plan, with some changes. When Hitler rose to power in Germany in 1933 he went his colleagues one better. There naturally are differences in the manner in which sport is conducted in these three nations; but, as we shall see, the differences are not fundamental. In all of them sport no longer exists primarily for the amusement and recreation of youth, but as the serious business of everyone from the time the child can walk until the man or woman has passed military age. Details differ. But in all three nations it is true that sport is only an instrument in the hands of a leader. He uses it for three main purposes:

First, to keep the young people busy, and hence contented. You cannot grumble, agitate, propagandize, or join in seditious movements against the government in power if you have been marching or exercising all day in the open air. Regimented sport thoroughly tires out the young and so serves as an excellent
sedative. It keeps the younger and naturally insurgent elements of the community from thinking too much about internal political conditions and lack of employment.

Second, the dictators have cleverly used sport as propaganda. No sensible person believes that a victory for the United States at the coming Olympic Games would furnish proof of American racial, intellectual, moral or physical superiority. Not so in dictatorship countries. In an international football match the national honor is at stake, and a victory calls for a day of rejoicing, for country-wide celebrations. Is France defeated by Germany in the Davis Cup tennis matches? A whole country hangs on the words of the blonde Teuton sitting beside the microphone in the Stade Roland Garros in Paris, and accepts the triumph as one more proof of the righteousness and strength of National Socialism. If Italy conquers England in football, Mussolini plays up the victory as another example of the superiority of a fascist state over a democracy.

Third and principally, sport in the lands of the dictator has for its end “the making of men capable of defense of the Fatherland.” It does not matter that this defense may take the young men as far afield as the borders of China or the burning sands of East Africa. To greater or less degree, Italy, Germany and Russia are today armed camps. In each, pleasure, sport, individuality, are all subordinated to the assumed military needs of the nation. Sport becomes just one branch of army training. Can the moral degradation of the ideals of sport be carried further?

Just how all this works out in the three countries concerned will be explained. But first I digress to recall an incident that happened several years ago when I was standing late one afternoon in the lobby of a famous Central European hotel. Along came a group of war veterans; at least they might have been thought to be war veterans had their ages been right. Limping, hobbling, patched and battered, they were the football team of Czechoslovakia. Their Italian opponents that afternoon had gone out to win regardless of the rules and the umpire; they had hammered, hit and gouged their way to victory. And so would you in their places, knowing what would be the attitude taken at home to men who proved themselves so unworthy as to lose in an international contest of such obvious importance. The honor of Italy was at stake, and maybe something more than honor for each of the team individually.
II

This is not the place to detail the enormous advances which Russia has made in athletics in the last twenty years, advances unequalled in any other country. Anyone interested in sport has heard of Luko, the Moscow sprinter who does the hundred metres in 10.3, the same time that Eddie Tolan made in winning the event in the last Olympics. We all have read of the athletic prowess of the Russian young women. Whereas there were 600,000 practising sportsmen in the Soviet Union in 1926 there are 2,000,000 today. The Dynamo Stadium in the capital is one of the most complete athletic plants anywhere on earth, with a cinder track, a cyclist track, five tennis courts with a seating accommodation around one of them for 4,000, two basketball courts, three volley ball courts, a football field and two practice fields, a large gymnasium, a hotel of sixty rooms with baths, lockers and equipment — all this besides space in the stadium proper for seating 60,000 spectators.

The credit for the very real progress which sport has made in Russia (and I believe the Russians have obtained greater value from their program than the population of the other dictatorial nations), should go to Stalin. He was the first dictator really to discover sports; the others have merely seized upon the idea and broadened it. "Every citizen," said Stalin, "has a duty to be physically fit and ready to repulse any attack from outside." Of course he had no real interest in sport as sport, but only as training for physical health; he was interested in athletics for the masses because the soldiery of the nation comes from the masses and a physically fit nation means a fit army.

In 1930 Stalin signed the decree organizing physical education throughout all Soviet Russia. Private sporting clubs and organizations were abolished and athletics of every kind were placed in the hands of the state. The Council of Physical Education which governs sport today is composed of eighty members, including some of the most important leaders of the Communist Party. It meets once a month to discuss policies. Control is decentralized through committees directing sport through the workmen’s syndicates, the peasants’ cooperatives, the army, and the OGPU. Sub-committees range from those which have authority over local sport in each republic all the way down to sporting committees in each factory which are chosen by the workers them-
selves. In principle, each factory has its own sports ground. An average sports ground for factory workers in Russia will contain several soccer football fields, a track, half a dozen tennis courts, volleyball ball courts, and other facilities. M. Robert Perrier in his brilliant book, "Les Camarades Sur Le Stade," states that in Leningrad football is the popular sport, with cross country running next. Leningrad, for instance, has seven large sport clubs, five belonging to factories and two to the municipality, as well as thirty-five clubs attached to small industrial plants. There are approximately 250,000 athletes in this city alone, among them 28,000 who in 1934 had already passed the "P.T.D." test.

The "P.T.D." test — "Ready for Work and Defense" — amounts to a kind of pentathlon. It is open to any citizen of any age or sex; those who pass it obtain a degree which is an honor, and which may indeed be considered such. The idea started in 1930, and has been developed so successfully that up to the present time almost 2,000,000 Russians have passed the test. The number could be equalled with difficulty in a country even as well advanced athletically as the United States. The test has recently been supplemented by a second one even more severe, requiring feats still more difficult. The first ten graduates of this second course were all officers of the Red Army.

Better than anything, the "P.T.D." shows just how Soviet Russia has militarized sport. The test of course includes the usual classical runs, jumps, vaults and so on, all of which must be accomplished within certain standards to obtain the diploma. For example, the 100-metre run must be covered within 14 seconds. Try that some time and see how easy it is to run 100 yards at the rate of 8 yards a second! But there are other requirements even more difficult. You must be able to throw a hand grenade 35 metres; ski ten kilometres; swim 50 metres with a gun; walk one kilometre with a gas mask on; ride; shoot; read a map; and give first aid. All very sporting. Those obtaining high marks are the corps d'élite of Russian sport. They are usually sent to one of the well-known athletic training schools in Moscow or Leningrad, where they may be turned into champions for the purpose of edifying and setting an example to the masses (there is no professionalism in Russia), or they may become physical instructors in schools, factories or the army.

The militarization of sport in Soviet Russia is taken as a matter of course. It is considered that every citizen has a duty
to develop his body and put it at the service of the nation. It might strike an American as amazing that a body of workers playing football near their factory should suddenly, at the call of a whistle, stop playing, change into uniforms, and appear to do an hour’s drill, crawling, running and jumping with their bayonets in their hands. It would not be anything out of the ordinary in a country where everyone, whether in the army at the moment or not, is expected to be physically fit and ready when and if called on to fight. Everyone in good health is a potential soldier; and every potential soldier must be in good health.

The Red Army itself is the sporting center of the country. In most cities it has the largest, best equipped and most luxurious sports ground. Specialization is strictly forbidden. In addition to regular drills and training, the private has several hours a day when he must devote himself to some form of unsupervised sport. The officers are capable sportsmen themselves, and are assisted by graduates of the various Institutes of Physical Education.

There are signs that as sport grows in Russia it will change somewhat, that the champion system no matter how rigorously forbidden will creep in (indeed, has begun quietly to creep in already), that competition with outside nations may some day be allowed. But the basic principle on which Stalin has organized Russian athletics, the idea that sport has only one function, to better the race and make the youth of the nation ready to fight— that idea will never be changed or supplanted so long as the dictatorship lasts. In Soviet Russia as in the other dictatorships sport and politics are inseparable.

Mussolini from the beginning appreciated the importance of athletics as a means of moulding the youth of Italy in the fascist tradition and for fascist ends. With the Soviet example before him he saw early that sport could be used to militarize the nation; he also saw that it was possible to go further than Soviet Russia had gone.

Mussolini obviously had an easier task than Stalin, for whereas the Soviet leader was obliged to educate the masses to athletics, Il Duce was dealing with a nation that already knew much about sport. For despite propaganda to prove that there was no such thing as sport in the peninsula before the war, Italian sport by no means dates from the March on Rome. There was sport and
there were sporting organizations in Italy long before fascism. The Italian Alpine Club was founded in 1863, the Cycling Federation was formed in 1870, in 1910 the Cross Country Union came into being, while football clubs were started in Genoa and Turin about 1895. Recent figures give the members of the various sporting federations as around 800,000 persons. Some of these federations, such as the tennis federation with its 11,000 members, show a large increase over pre-fascist years; while others, like that of Alpinism with 60,000 members as against 40,000 in 1920, show a much smaller growth than has been registered in other countries, notably Austria and Czechoslovakia. The point is that there was sport in Italy before Il Duce seized power.¹

Outside competition has never been permitted by the Soviet authorities, hence Soviet athletes have had no opportunity to measure their skill with foreigners. Mussolini had the idea of putting athletes to work in the service of the nation and of fascist ideology by entering them in international competitions. Matches with other lands have become a powerful weapon in his service, and just as graduates of small colleges in the United States receive a personal sense of satisfaction when their football team defeats the eleven of some large university, so in Italy victory over foreign lands becomes a salve, spread thickly on the national ego by the Duce. An Italian triumph in football, cycling, tennis, or any other sport, particularly if over old rivals like the French, is seized upon, written up and paraded as proof positive of the superiority of the race and its governing principles. While if natural athletes like the English are defeated, the victory becomes almost an occasion for a national holiday. Italians and Italian teams about to go abroad are “pepped up” by interviews with Il Duce; they receive telegrams of exhortation before beginning their matches and messages of congratulation afterwards if they have done well. When the cycling team in the Tour de France placed up in front, Achille Starace, President of the Italian Olympic Committee and at the same time Secretary of the Fascist Party, sent a wire expressing the confidence of Il Duce and the country. In short, it is impressed on the Italian athlete that “he represents not himself alone but the entire nation in a struggle for the existence of a national culture.” “Athletes of Italy,” shouts Il Duce, “remember that when you fight outside the borders of Italy, you carry the honor, the sporting prestige

of the nation in your muscles, your bodies and your souls.”

In 1925, all athletics, sports, amusements for workers, and cultural training were made fascist (or as they say in Germany, gleichgeschaltet) and ordered to join a national organization called the Dopolavoro, or National After-Work Guild. This is another method of supervising the free hours of the populace and it is carried out in a hierarchic manner through sporting societies. Theoretically, the object of the Dopolavoro was to enable the mass of workers in factories and fields to enjoy cultural benefits and sporting facilities after work. Actually, all workers’ athletic associations were obliged to join the Dopolavoro, a huge organization closely allied to the Fascist Party and governed entirely by party officials. Some of the finest homes of the old Socialist Party, such as the Spreti Palace in Ravenna and the Casa del Popolo in Rome, were given over to the Dopolavoro.

Thus sport ceased to be a free activity and became a function of the government. Inside each branch of sport arose a hierarchy, a relationship of master and servant, so that athletics gradually assumed the moral characteristics of the régime. If you wanted to play golf, tennis, football or any other sport, you had to belong to a club controlled by the Dopolavoro, a club whose officials were not of your choosing but named by some party official in Rome; moreover, besides regular club dues, you had to pay annual dues of 2½ lire to the National Dopolavoro Institute. In 1926 the Secretary General of the Fascist Party went so far as to declare that the Italian Olympic Committee was a dependent organ charged with the duty of supervising all activities and sports, a fact so far overlooked by zealots who have protested against the same thing under Hitler.

“The youth of Italy,” said the Secretary, “is now entirely fascist. Since everything which is Italian is placed under the nation’s flag, it was only logical that the sporting world should likewise be ranged under its shadow.” Those sporting organizations which preferred to manage their own affairs were dissolved. In 1929 he announced that he had “named secretaries for the national tennis, skiing, boxing, swimming, football and cyclist organizations.” All of these were placed under the supervision of the Olympic Committee, headed by a fascist official.

Signor Maraviglia, a member of the Fascist Grand Council, puts the case for sports in this way: “Sport is not an end to itself.

*Corriere della Sera, November 18, 1934.*
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It is no longer a matter of personal choice. Organizations are not built up in accordance with personal tastes, but along military lines. In this transformation we see one of the most interesting and important phases of fascism. Fascism avails itself of the various forms of sport, especially those with large groups of participants as a means of military preparation and spiritual development, that is, as a school for the national training of Italian youth. By popularizing and militarizing sports, fascism accomplishes its greatest governmental work.3

In step with the regimentation of all sporting activities came the increasing militarization of Italian youth. At first the training was restricted to the Fasci di Giovani, young men of 18 to 21. Then it was extended to younger boys, and today an Italian lad starts his military preparation at the advanced age of 6 as a member of the Figli della Lupa, or "Sons of the She-Wolf." At 8 he is enrolled in the Balilla and given gas-mask drill, shooting practice with rifles and machine guns, special gymnastics, route marches and a period under canvas in the field so that he can step into the next higher branch thoroughly trained.

Nor are the girls neglected. In Roma Fascista of February 19, 1928, it was explained that "The Fascist Girls" (Giovani Italiane) would hold their first meeting that spring at Rome in the National Stadium. "Each one of them coming to the capital will carry a musket, Model 91. Among the contests, one given the highest weight in the scoring will be target shooting." Here is the clear indication of what Fascism intends to do with this new institution. "Perhaps," writes the Secretary General of the Party, "someone will protest and murmur. Let the Young Fascists raise their muskets aloft in answer."

The final step in the militarization of sport came last summer with the institution of the new weekend called the "Fascist Saturday." By a governmental decree all work stops on Saturdays at one in the afternoon, when all fascists are obliged to report to "their respective bodies to undergo political, cultural, sporting, and especially military, that is fascist, training."4 Luckily, salaries were not permitted to be cut, all good fascists being given the privilege of making up the hours lost by overtime work during the week.

To Mussolini's mind, games are useful if they result in interna-

3 Tribuna, July 5, 1929.
tional victories and so reveal fascist superiority. The results are watched, collected, catalogued and exploited, at home and abroad. From this point of view sport is a big nationalized industry. But this is really only a minor part of what sports are expected to accomplish. The real business of sport is to make soldiers. Through his development, control and militarization of sport, Mussolini has succeeded in making every male from 6 to 55 an actual or potential soldier.

IV

Hitlerism, it is often said, is a youth movement. But the same observation applies to Communism and Fascism. Each dictator saw from the start the importance of having youth on his side. Mussolini and Hitler have merely taken a step forward — unless you choose to consider it a step backward — in adapting sport to their personal and party purposes. First Stalin militarized athletics in Russia. Mussolini added the idea of sport as national propaganda, as a kind of nation-wide and world-wide advertising medium. Hitler did both these things; like Stalin and Mussolini he saw to it that the boys were kept busy and tired, he used athletics and outdoor exercise to train them for the army, and he made international sporting events outlets for propaganda. Then he went further. He made sport one more means of breaking down opposition by ostracizing certain classes of citizens so that they could take no part whatsoever in organized athletics.

Sport in Germany is under the direction of the Nazi Party, which has delegated the responsibility of running it to the best advantage to Herr Hans Tschammer und Osten, a kind of dictator under a dictator. The Nazi Party, of which Tschammer und Osten is an official, has regimented every phase of German life. Nowhere is the control more rigid than in the ordering of athletics. Whatever happens in sport in the Fatherland does so upon the order of and with the approval of the Party; no sporting event takes place about which they do not know and of which they do not approve. Politics and sport are inseparable.

Tschammer und Osten, Reichssportkommissar, controls both the policies and activities of German athletics. Like other leaders of sport in other dictatorships, he is interested merely in sport as a means to an end. Like his Italian counterpart, he places tremendous emphasis on victory over foreign teams, and preparation for all international sporting meetings is carried on with the same
attention to detail as in Italy. Other angles of sport are inconsequential. "I do not care about professionalism," he told a French journalist of my acquaintance. "The question is unimportant." Talk about fair play and sportsmanship is regarded as a symptom of weakness. Everything is a side issue which does not feed the one paramount purpose, to render the youth of the nation better soldiers and hence better able to carry out the purposes of the régime.

Mussolini's action in taking over control of all sport was copied in Germany, but carried a long step further, when athletic clubs and societies were given public orders to purge themselves of "undesirables." An incomplete list of leading Jewish athletes ousted from sporting clubs or barred from sporting competition would include Werner Schottmann, Germany's best 200-metre dash man; Marta Jakob, woman champion javelin thrower; Frau Friedleben, Dr. Daniel Prenn, and Frau Nelly Nepach (she later committed suicide), leading tennis players; Ernie Seelig, middle-weight boxing champion; Jakob Levy, celebrated Hamburg sprinter; Gretel Bergmann, champion woman runner. Of course there were many others less famous. If you wish to engage in sport in Germany, you must, as in Italy, be a party member; but in Germany this means that you must be what is called an "Aryan," and able to prove it.

The Germans seem to have gone further than anyone in the moral degradation of sport. You must be a Nazi in order to be allowed to play; and if your Nazi sentiments turn out to be lukewarm, you cannot even keep the emblems of the victory you have won. In July 1935 the Blau-Weiss Tennis Club of Dresden was disqualified after winning a title because when several members of the team were questioned afterward by the Gaudietwart, a public official, they were so injudicious as to reveal doubts about the righteousness of Nazi policies. The official who disqualified the team explained his action by stating that "only those can be victors in the Third Reich who have mastered the National Socialist ideology and can show that they can hold their ground not only in sporting contests but in national life." As a warning to other sports clubs, the Sports Service of the German News Bureau announced that "in the future winners of athletic contests in the Third Reich may be only those who master National Socialist ideology." This doctrine was given official recognition shortly after the first of the present year when Kurt Münch, head of the Reich's Diet, in his New Year's message on "Politics in Sport,"
published in the _Berliner Lokal Anzeiger_, declared that competition in German athletics was to be limited to those Germans who are sympathetic to National Socialism. He also asserted that the task of a sports leader in the Reich must be considered as primarily political and that all members of the Nazi Association for Physical Culture should become imbued with the spirit of National Socialism. Thus it is no longer merely a question of eliminating the "non-Aryan" from German sport. Sport is also a weapon to bludgeon the German young into the "right frame of mind."

The youth movement of the Third German Reich is called the _Hitler-Jugend_. This movement, started in 1926, was taken over entirely by the Nazi Party, and is today a part of the government with a huge organization directed by a 29-year old leader, Baldur von Schirach, whom Sir Philip Gibbs considers capable of succeeding one day to Hitler's position and power. Boasting 6,000,000 members, it is organized along military lines with squads, companies, battalions and regiments. Through _Wehrsport_, or military athletics, it aims to prepare the youth of Germany to step into the army trained and ready to fight. _Wehrsport_ includes marching, trench digging, use of dugouts, creeping under barbed wire, bayonet drill, gas defense, and so forth; while the girls supplement their physical training by courses in first aid.

The question arose early as to whether other youth organizations had the right to continue to exist. Says von Schirach: "Even after the seizure of power there continued to sit in Berlin the so-called _Reichssausschuss der deutschen Jugendverbaende_ (National Committee of German Youth Organizations), a working community in which all German youth organizations, Marxist, denominational and others, sat side by side with equal privileges and sought in endless discussion to establish their right to exist. I took the liberty of putting an end to this unworthy state of affairs by giving the order to occupy the business premises of the committee. Then in a veritable blaze of demonstrations, the remnants of other youth organizations were crushed out of existence. Many became incorporated in the _Hitler-Jugend_, and at the beginning of 1934 the incorporation of the Evangelical Youth all but gave the finishing stroke; that is to say that there now remained outside the _Hitler-Jugend_ only one Youth Organization, the Catholic. All the others had come over to us."

So far the Catholic Youth organizations have not succumbed

to the dictator, though their freedom of action has been restricted in many directions. Moreover, one suspects that, despite the claims of von Schirach, many Protestants have also failed to respond whole-heartedly. Like all propagandists, he makes large claims. The number he gives as being affiliated with the Hitler-Jugend is 6,000,000. Even if this is correct, less than half the youth of Germany are enrolled under Hitler's banners, for a dispatch from Berlin early in the year states that 9,000,000 young Germans are to be conscripted into a new Reich Youth League "to be drilled in sport, discipline and pre-military exercises, and above all in National Socialist Weltanschauung (World Outlook)." This is tantamount to a confession that voluntary membership in the Hitler-Jugend has not been effective after all. The whip is now to be cracked. Conscription is to do what appeals and pressure could only partially accomplish.

Sport and militarism go hand in hand in Germany, as they do in Russia and Italy. The only difference is that in Germany the connection is even more openly avowed and emphasized. A textbook entitled "Physical Training for Military Defense," by Hermann Teske, sports teacher in an army school near Berlin, states: "The aim of all physical training was and always will be Wehrhaftigkeit. German recruits are to be led away from the poisonous idea of 'sport for sport's sake,' which does not fit into the Nazi Weltanschauung. All German sports must have a purpose." The well-trained body serves the war machine, he states, and games such as football seem to him especially good preparation for war. He writes: "What the young peasant learns in the evening — running, jumping, tactical movements, fitting into the team, above all, fighting — all this is just what an infantryman needs in the battle."*

Could a dictator falsify further the ideals of sport as we conceive them? With every form of athletics organized and supervised by party officials under strict government control; with everyone who is not a member of an authorized sports club (i.e. who does not belong to the one government party) refused all athletic privileges; with international contests seized on for purposes of party or racial propaganda; with "victory" reserved for the politically and racially "eligible;" and with games turned primarily into preparation of young men and women for war — it is hard to see how sport could be further prostituted and debased.