

SPORTS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN UZBEKISTAN DURING THE SOVIET PERIOD

Normuminov Azizbek Sadyk ogli,
PhD Searcher at Karshi State University,

Abstract

This article analyzes the formation and development of the physical education and sports system during the Soviet era. Special attention is given to reforms implemented in Uzbekistan in the field of sports, competitions organized among students and youth, women's participation in sports, and the expansion of sports infrastructure. Based on archival sources and scientific literature, the study demonstrates the increasing socio-educational importance of sports in society and the growing international reputation of Soviet athletes.

Keywords: Soviet Union, Uzbekistan, sports, physical education, infrastructure, competitions.

Introduction

The socio-educational importance of sports in the development of society is immeasurable. During the Soviet era, sports were not only a means of strengthening public health but also emerged as a crucial direction of state propaganda and education policy. Within this framework, the upbringing of children and youth as physically strong and morally mature individuals was defined as a priority task.

In Uzbekistan as well, significant attention was paid to the development of physical education and sports. Sports competitions were organized, infrastructure was expanded, and women's participation in sports steadily increased.

According to archival sources, in 1946 only 4.04% of the population of the Uzbek SSR was covered by physical education and sports, but plans were made to increase this figure in subsequent years [2]. In 1953, athletics and swimming competitions with the active participation of female students in pedagogical colleges and institutes were organized [2][3]. By the 1960s–1970s, the sports infrastructure had developed rapidly, with more than 2,000 stadiums and hundreds of thousands of sports grounds put into operation [4]. In the 1963 XVI Spartakiad of schoolchildren, female participants also achieved leading positions.

By 1964, 43.1 million people were reported to be engaged in physical education teams and had achieved various sports ranks [7]. In 1973, more than 32,000 athletes, including over 6,000 women, took part in sports collectives in Tashkent region [8]. Soviet athletes demonstrated outstanding results in international competitions, becoming world champions in chess, gymnastics, athletics, and other sports [9][10].

At the same time, sports games among rural youth gained popularity. For example, in 1974, more than 300,000 young people participated in the final competitions held in Samarkand [11][12].

Sports occupy an important place in the life of human society. Their importance grew even further once they entered the international arena, attracting large audiences. In the Soviet Union, special attention was paid to physical education and sports. The CPSU Program stated: "One of the Party's most important tasks is to nurture a young generation that is physically strong,



harmoniously developed both physically and morally, starting from early childhood.” During the years of Soviet power, physical education and sports truly became a people’s cause [1, p.108]. In particular, in 1946 only 4.04% of the population of the Uzbek SSR engaged in physical education and sports (in rural areas this figure was only 0.73%), but by 1949 it was planned to increase the coverage to 20% [2]. In 1953, sports competitions in athletics and swimming were organized among students of pedagogical colleges, with the majority of participants being female students [3]. Similar competitions were also held among students of pedagogical institutes, with the Nizami Tashkent State Pedagogical Institute emerging as a leader in these events [4].

By 1964, Soviet athletes had access to 2,227 stadiums, 54,900 football fields, 341,900 volleyball, basketball, and tennis courts, 23,000 multipurpose sports grounds, and more than 26,000 gymnastics halls, along with other facilities. Across the USSR, 17 physical education institutes and 51 faculties of physical education in pedagogical institutes were training qualified specialists. In addition, three scientific research institutes specialized in studying problems of physical education and sports [1, p.108].

In May 1963, the XVI Spartakiad of Uzbek schoolchildren was held in 10 sports disciplines with more than 1,000 participants. In the chess competitions, female players such as Kozuleeva, Goldman, Lukovskaya, Mirtichyan, Molchanova, and Turgunova won leading positions [5].

The number of people engaged in sports in the Soviet Union grew every year. By 1964, there were 191,000 physical education collectives with 43.1 million participants. Among them, 43,000 were awarded the title of “Master of Sports,” and more than 6.7 million held various sports categories. Around 6.4 million people practiced athletics, 5.6 million volleyball, 3 million football, over 3 million chess, 2.9 million basketball, more than 1 million cycling, and 800,000 gymnastics. Skating, hockey, swimming, boxing, weightlifting, shooting, motor sports, and other disciplines also developed significantly [1, p.108].

For example, in 1973, in 13 districts of Tashkent region, 120 sports collectives operated with 32,214 athletes, of whom 6,304 were women. However, only 65 of these collectives had professional sports instructors [6].

Soviet athletes achieved worldwide fame in disciplines such as high jump, hockey, boxing, tennis, and skating. In addition, Soviet chess players enjoyed not only national but also global prestige, maintaining dominance for decades. Many Soviet athletes held honorable places among world champions.

They competed against athletes from 89 countries in international tournaments, including world championships, European championships, and both summer and winter Olympic Games, as well as Friendship competitions [1, p.108]. Soviet athletes reached great achievements in high jump, hockey, Greco-Roman and freestyle wrestling, gymnastics, boxing, weightlifting, shooting, skiing, skating, athletics, and basketball.

The Soviet chess school became world-renowned. Soviet chess players successfully retained world champion titles for many years in both men’s and women’s categories. Among Soviet athletes, there were numerous world and European record holders and champions.

The Soviet Union was an active participant in the international sports movement. It maintained sports relations with 89 countries across five continents. Each year, prominent Soviet athletes took part in 45–50 official competitions, including world and European championships, European Cups, Olympic Games, and international friendship games for youth and students [1,



p.109].

In 1974, according to a resolution of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Uzbek SSR, the IV All-Union Rural Youth Sports Games qualifying competitions were held. A total of 1,892 sports collectives participated, with more than 300,000 athletes taking part. The final stage took place in Samarkand on May 23–28 of that year, where athletes competed in 13 sports. Among the 1,496 participants, 247 were women [7][8].

During the Soviet era, the development of physical education and sports was defined as an important direction of state policy, and its social significance steadily increased. Through the sports system, the upbringing of a physically and morally mature generation was ensured, along with the mass involvement of the population in sports, the growing participation of women, and the expansion of sports infrastructure. At the same time, Soviet athletes achieved great success on the international stage, strengthening the country's prestige in the field of sports.

The findings of the research demonstrate that sports played an important role not only in health and cultural life but also in political and social processes.

The Soviet model of sports was more than a system of physical training: it was a comprehensive socio-political tool. By promoting mass participation, supporting women's involvement, and building extensive infrastructure, the state embedded sports into everyday life. On the international stage, Soviet athletes' victories served as symbols of national prestige and ideological superiority. Thus, sports under the USSR functioned simultaneously as a health initiative, cultural practice, and political instrument, leaving a profound legacy in both domestic society and global sports history.

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