

Sports, Democracy and Reeducation during the American Occupation of Germany

In the wake of World War Two American forces occupied a zone of west Germany. One of the many and varied problems that American forces faced was the question of what to do with German youth. The expectation was that this highly Nazified group, which had been indoctrinated, “educated for death”, particularly through the Hitler Youth (HJ) and the League of German Girls (BDM), held the key to Germany’s reeducation. Part of this effort was the German Youth Activities (GYA) program in which sports played a significant part. It was believed that introduction to American ‘sportsmanship’ would lead Germans by example to a more democratic way of life. As one United States Forces European Theater staffer said: ‘One of the most effective means of achieving international amity and understanding in the past has been through the medium of sports and other similar mutual activities.’¹ Soldiers would be the ‘salesmen of democracy’ through American sports such as baseball, football, or basketball.² Rather than the Nazi regime’s militarized use of sports, under the American Military Government, ‘physical education of the youth will concentrate on elements of health, hygiene and recreation which will exclude from this type of sport elements of assimilated military character.’³ This paper considers and analyses the relationship between sports, democracy, and reeducation during the American Occupation of Germany.

¹ USFET *Weekly Information Bulletin* 16, ‘Occupation Troops and Youth Activities’, (10 November 1945), p. 17.

² Charles E. Campbell, Office of the Chief Historian, European Command, Frankfurt-Am-Main, Germany, *Occupation Forces in Europe Series, 1945-46: German Youth Activities of the United States Army*, (11 May 1948), p. 1.

³ Allied Control Council Directive No. 23, ‘Limitation and Demilitarization of Sport in Germany’, (17 December 1945).