EPILOGUE

The 1950s was the formative decade of the East German government’s efforts to establish legitimacy and build a socialist polity, economy, society, and culture. Sports became a key component of the government’s efforts to “build socialism,” in part due to their long-standing popularity at the grassroots. The government—led by enthusiastic athlete and leader Walter Ulbricht—used sports to mobilize the population, cultivate work productivity and paramilitary skills, foster socialist community, and promote East German patriotism. The East German government saw sports as a vehicle to transform each and every East German into a new socialist citizen; it pursued this transformation with optimism and enthusiasm.

In addition to emphasizing mass sports for the general population, the SED’s Central Committee had begun to take preliminary steps in the 1950s to cultivate internationally successful athletes, not only through orchestrating the Friedensfahrt, but also by opening the first Children’s and Youth Sports Schools (Kinder- und Jugendsportschulen) in East Berlin, Halberstadt, Brandenburg, and Leipzig in 1952 and by founding the first Sports Clubs (SCs) to train exceptional athletes in 1954. These clubs soon became the focus of East German elite sports, with twenty-one clubs in place by 1955; Täve Schur and his Friedensfahrt teammates trained with the SC DHfK (Deutsche Hochschule für Körperkultur). Alongside these measures to promote athletic achievement, the regular East German citizen, not destined for athletic greatness, remained at the center of East German efforts to promote athleticism in the 1950s. However, this commitment to mass sports would decline in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, as international athletic victories became the state’s top priority.

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Beginning in the 1960s, especially as East Germany increasingly abandoned its rhetoric of German reunification in the aftermath of the construction of the Berlin Wall, the East German government strongly enhanced its programs to cultivate elite athletes as its representatives in the international arena. Although East German athletes continued to participate in the *Friedensfahrt* and in countless world championships in multiple sports, the chief focus of East German political and sports leaders soon narrowed to the Olympic Games, the world’s most prominent athletic stage. Among the key innovations was the introduction of the *Spartakiaden* in 1965. The *Spartakiaden* were sports competitions designed only for children and teenagers and only for Olympic sports that consisted of yearly qualification rounds in kindergartens, schools, neighborhoods, and towns, followed by county championships and biannual regional and national championships. In contrast, the Gymnastics and Sports Festivals were designed for all age groups, including adults, featured competitions in non-Olympic sports, and incorporated popular non-competitive games designed for mass appeal. The primary goal of the *Spartakiaden* was, in the words of the SED’s Secretary for Achievement Sports (*Leistungssport*), the “urgent expansion of the foundation for Olympic sports.” The *Spartakiaden* discovered talented young athletes and became “the first step towards a nearly flawless system of talent search and training, with which the East German athletic establishment, in its hunt for Olympic laurels, compensated for its small population.”

The search for talented young athletes took another step forward in 1967 when researchers at the German College for Physical Culture devised a chart that pinpointed physical characteristics in children that made them likely to attain athletic success in a range of sports. Based on this chart, sports organizers began weighing and measuring schoolchildren throughout the GDR to predict their future abilities. This process became formalized in 1973 when the Ministry for Education and the DTSB joined together to establish a plan known as ESA, or “Einheitliche Sichtung und Auswahl für die Trainingszentren und Trainingsstützpunkte des DTSB der DDR” (Coordinated Inspection

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