



MALMÖ HÖGSKOLA

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Hans Bonde's major study of Danish sports during the German occupation 1940–45, *Fodbold med fjenden: Dansk idræt under hagekorset*, reviewed at idrottsforum.org by Hans Bolling, was published in English in 2008, entitled *Football With the Foe: Danish Sport Under the Swastika* (University Press of Southern Denmark; the odd choice of title might be explained by the existence of *Football Against the Enemy* by Simon Kuper.) In order to get a perspective on the book and the dramatic historical period it portrays, we asked our Australian correspondent Wendy Varney, who previously reviewed Bonde's *Niels Bukh biography* for idrottsforum.org, for a review. In her thorough, and thoroughly enjoyable, review, she finds that *Football With the Foe* presents important data and analyses for sport history as well as for European history in general, and specifically, on the Second World War. The book is also a forceful comment on the frequently and widely held assumption that sport and politics must be kept apart. However, as was the case with the *Niels Bukh* book, Wendy Varney must accept the book hasn't been indexed, an oversight made all the more noticeable by the fact that it's the kind of book one will return to many times for factfinding and verification.

Danish sports under occupation

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*Hans Bonde***Football With the Foe: Danish Sport under the Swastika**

272 page, hc., ill.

Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark 2008

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In debates about the greatest swimmer of all times, the name of Ragnild Hveger features strongly – when she is remembered. Hveger set 42 world records and at one time held 19 of these simultaneously. Her records covered distances as short as 100 yards and as long as 1 mile, highlighting not only her talent but also her versatility in the water. It seems surprising, then, that the Danish swimmer is not better known. It is sometimes noted that her times were fast but her timing poor for, as a 15-year-old, she arose on the Olympic stage as a silver medallist in 1936, the last Olympics to be held until 1948. Presumably, she would have peaked for the 1940 and 1944 Olympics, which of course were cancelled, arguably robbing her of the chance for more medals and to put her stamp more prominently on world swimming.



FOOTBALL WITH THE FOE
HANS BONDE
DANISH SPORT UNDER THE SWASTIKA

But there was more to Ragnild Hveger than her swimming records. Hans Bonde's tantalising book *Football with the Foe*, shows that Hveger was one of a number of Danish sportspeople who were used by Nazi Germany to legitimise that regime. Some did this more than others and some, to their credit, refused to partake in this process at all. Hveger and her fellow swimmer Jenny Kammersgaard can be seen as primary collaborators and, in detailing the nature of their relationship, Bonde throws light on a number of ways in which sporting relations both assisted the Nazis but also diminished the chances for a collective resistance by Danish sport. Not that Hveger and

Kammersgaard should be singled out ahead of some organisations which conveniently turned a blind eye to the unfolding of events, but they do provide telling examples in the use of propaganda.

Kammersgaard, for instance, through her success in the pool, provided the Nazis with an opportunity to buttress their claims of superior Aryan bodies and all that flowed from that claim. While Kammersgaard can hardly be blamed for her success or for the controversial claims of German Nazis, she did allow herself, unwittingly or otherwise, to become entangled in the propaganda associated with these claims and to have her success exploited for malevolent purposes.

In 1937, after swimming across the Danish Kattegat, from Odden to Sangstrup Klint in 29 hours, Kammersgaard received a congratulatory telegram from Hitler. In a prelude to later fraternising with the Nazis, she appears to have been flattered by Hitler's telegram and expressed that it had been "friendly" of him. Indeed it was, for Hitler was well aware that sporting relations with other nations and especially relations in which Aryan successes could be guaranteed, were an important means of legitimising a range of aspects of his regime and its aggressive objectives.

As Bonde notes, "Danish collaborative sporting relations with the Germans were the most comprehensive form of cultural collaboration during the occupation and the only form that was effective" (14). This is sobering and is supported by a comparison with, for example, the Royal Danish Theatre which generally did not allow the sort of cultural exchange seen in sport and even gave rise to some detectable resistance.

One of the key points in Bonde's book is that the relationships had a dynamics to them that exhibits a cultural capture by Germany. He explains that, whereas initially Danish sport was under intense pressure to collaborate, eventually Danish sports leaders were actively seeking and promoting these relationships. Bonde thus describes the policy of collaboration as "a grey zone that could quickly turn black, a slippery slope where an intially chilly disposition could develop into an active accommodation of the rulers' wishes, even before the German authorities had formulated them" (18).

Fortunately there were some internal constraints, coming largely from the grass roots. As so often happens when governments or organisations look to collaboration or ineffectual measures, ordinary citizens took resistance into their own hands. Danish citizens interestingly took spiritual and moral sustenance from the BBC and expressed their contempt for German occupiers and pretenders through boos and whistling at German 'heil' salutes, challenging their legitimacy and undermining their efforts at propaganda through sport.

A football match in 1941 against Admira, a team from Vienna who, by their 'heil' salute, made it clear that they were satisfied to be connected with the Nazi regime, gives an indication of the resentment borne by Dane citizens towards the occupiers, while its aftermath supports Bonde's point about the slippery slope down which Danish sport had gone. On this occasion tensions between German soldiers and Danish spectators resulted in the soldiers drawing their bayonets and the Danes retaliating with brandished beer bottles. Ten or more people were hospitalised but it was feared that injuries might extend beyond these to the sporting relations between Denmark and Germany. The reaction of the Danish football association's chairperson was of fear that relations would be damaged, rather than acknowledgement of the extent to which football had been politicised, given that it was the 'heil' sign by the Admira team that had sparked the jeers and ignited the tensions which resulted in the melee. His letter of regret to the German organisers signifies that Danish sporting leadership was indeed on the slippery slope.

Of course, it was not only individuals that protested. Danish Social Democrats and Communists, recognising early danger signs of where Hitler was taking Germany and the broader threat to Europe, had objected to the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. "The leftist social-democratic Danish workers' sports association, Dansk Arbejder Idrætsforbund, in contrast to bourgeois sport and its press, took a strong stand against the Olympics" (27). The Danish sports association Hakoah, not surprisingly, boycotted the Olympics in Berlin, as did individual wrestler Abraham Kurland and fencer Ivan Osier.

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The Danish Olympic Committee, however, saw such boycotts as political intrusion into sport, insisting that the games were apolitical. Bonde makes the point that the slogan that sport should be kept free of politics was highly elastic and indeed "could be used to legitimise diametrically opposed positions" (242).

Certainly a number of athletes and athletic support personnel were more enthusiastic than neutral in their politics, while others became more gradually imbedded. Jørgen Beyerholm, track leader and press officer of the Danish Bicycle Club was among the former, as was Hans Spanheimer, a middle distance runner and journalist for the Nazi newspaper *Fædrelandet*.

The book is packed with such examples but not at the expense of an overview of the different sporting organisations, which of course often had quite different and sometimes shifting loyalties and positions. Utilising a great deal of useful and invaluable research from the Masters thesis of Martin Frei, Bonde provides useful cross analysis which works well, so that the reader can appreciate, for instance, that Norwegian sporting organisations took a very

different approach and favoured anti-Nazi boycotts. The point is also made that Swedish sport leadership hindered Danish sport from having even more extensive relationships with the Germans, reminding us that actions have impacts, in sport and beyond.

Bonde looks at the sporting relations chronologically but also on a sport-by-sport basis, and also provides other comparative analysis. He discusses instances such as the dropping of two Jewish wrestlers from the Danish wrestling team that was having trouble getting travel permits from the German authorities. Not surprisingly, when the two Jewish wrestlers were dropped from the team, the issue of these permits became unproblematic. There is a vast array of similar instances, the Danish sporting federation (DIF) all the while insisting that the organisation was operating untouched by politics.

In most cases it was a case of turning a blind eye to the impacts of sporting collaboration. Bonde claims that only a few of the leaders, decision-makers and athletes “were influenced by Nazi ideology and an infatuation with the occupying power” (236). Both Hveger and Kammergaard appear to have fallen into this category, Hveger being hired as a swimming instructor in Kiel in 1943 and remaining in Germany until the end of the war. This was a time when she could have proved a role model for Danish citizens who initially held great affection for her. The London-based magazine *Frit Danmark* was to claim that Hveger had become “very unpopular in Denmark because of her Nazi friends” (200) but Bonde thinks it is uncertain whether Danes knew of the full extent of her collaboration. In any case, he notes that “There was still a need for her as a symbol of a dynamic, forward-looking, victorious Dane” (201).

Largely as a result of uncertainty about how well sport could be utilised when sporting fans themselves were using matches for protests, the Germans lost their keenness for sporting relations. This was doubtless also due to the Germans having overextended themselves in the war effort. Understandably, the fun and games of sport can be detrimental for troop morale, rather than enhancing it, when a war is “going badly” and when resources are scarce. It is interesting that, in earlier days, by contrast, far more resources had been channelled towards entertainment and propaganda around sport than to the sport activities themselves, verifying Nazi’s high regard for sport as propaganda.

The content of this book has unearthed important data and analysis for sports history, European history, war history and much more. As icing on the cake, the book also includes a number of very fine photographs, many of which could stand alone to make bold statements about the way in which human rights were overlooked and sport was subjugated to the demands and desires of the Nazi regime.

The one flaw of this book that does spring to mind constantly is, ironically, made all the stronger because of its great worth. Despite containing a wonderful collection of details, narratives and much that has never previously been published, *Football with the Foe* has not been indexed. I know this will annoy me many times over as it is a book I will undoubtedly return to to verify, help analyse and argue issues in the history and politics of sport.

Fittingly, the book is dedicated to two men who, unlike the Danish sports federation, did take a stand against sporting relations with Germany. Their stand is to be applauded, as is this wonderful book.

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