

1948: The Truth Regarding the Great Rift [1948: Η Αλήθεια για τη Μεγάλη Ρήξη]

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Pampos Stylianou's book examines the division in sports as a reflection of the ideological rift that extended to all aspects of life in Cyprus during the 1940s. In addition to the introduction, epilogue, and bibliography, the book includes ten chapters that cover a wide range of topics related to sports during the 1940s and 1950s in Cyprus.

In the first three chapters, the author makes a historical review beginning from the foundation and the operation of the first reading rooms, gymnastic clubs and associations. In the four following chapters, he examines how the rift in sports gradually developed. The eighth and ninth chapters present those actions that led to the unification in sports, and examine the events that took place in the period immediately after the unification. The last chapter analyses how the Turkish Cypriots were organised in sports during the period under examination.

For writing this book, P. Stylianou studied the press of the period under examination, as well as the Cypriot literature, particularly books and articles related to the history of sports in Cyprus. The book contains a rich photographic documentation of the entire period under study and offers fascinating snapshots of sporting life on the island.

The author presents in detail how the gymnastics clubs, associations, and other sports bodies had operated since their foundation, and he assesses their leading role during the 1940s and 1950s. As the author very strongly argues, the operation of gymnastics clubs was decisive, both for the development of sports and for the subsequent policy of exclusion and constant control that was applied to sports events.

The rapidly rising popularity of football, especially from the 1930s onwards, led to a shift in interest from classical sports to football. As a result, there was greater engagement with football, and, gradually, a better organisational structure in comparison to other sports, with the establishment of teams, the recruitment of coaches, etc. Most of the teams that starred in the 1940s had been already founded, and the same goes for the Cyprus Football Association.

The book sheds light to unknown incidents in the sporting life of the island, and highlights important and, at times, insurmountable problems encountered at the time by the sports organisations. These problems included the absence of stadiums and gyms, and the efforts to build new ones. Financial problems plagued the clubs, either as a result of the political disputes or a lack of public interest. The book presents those occasional efforts made by individuals to promote sports participation, despite all the above-mentioned difficulties.

Furthermore, Stylianou records the results of football matches and athletics competitions held in the period under study. He provides biographical information about Cypriot athletes and coaches of the 1940s and 1950s. The author also mentions various individuals who played an active part in the sporting life of Cyprus by holding important positions as founding members of the new associations, or as members of administrative boards, etc.

Comprehension of the historical context is a prerequisite for a better understanding of the events that unfolded in the island's sporting life. The author mentions, throughout the book, the historical events of the period, without failing to express his own opinion regarding these events. From the municipal elections of 1943 onwards, the sports clubs and associations started to express their political affiliation with political parties, and to identify with those parties' positions on the political developments in Cyprus and the Civil War events in Greece. This political polarisation resulted in a turbulent situation, with documented extreme reactions. Moreover, the premises of the sports associations were used as venues for holding speeches and meetings of the representatives of various clubs and organisations for the discussion of mainly political issues. The participation of political figures in the gymnastics clubs by holding leadership positions could only contribute to the intensification of the rift.

The rift in the society as a result of the polarisation created by the Greek Civil War had an impact on football and gymnastics clubs, reaching extremes, such as the exclusion or even the unregistration of athletes from clubs, preventing athletes and teams from entering stadiums, and, consequently, the creation of new clubs and a new Cypriot sports federation and, eventually, the organisation of two separate football championships. In his book, Stylianou extensively presents the conditions under which the new football clubs, such as Nea Salamina, Alki, Orfeas, and Omonia, were founded, as well as the first steps towards their establishment and operation.

Just as important is the author's description of the role of AON [Ανορθωτική Οργάνωση Νεολαίας] and the organisation's activities in sports, including the setting

up of all-Cypriot youth sports competitions, as a result of the rift. An indication of how the events in Greece continued to have an impact on the Cypriot situation, even after the end of the Greek Civil War, is the decision made by the AON Central Committee to dedicate the 4th Pan-Cypriot Youth Games of 1952 to the ‘memory of the hero Nikos Belogiannis’; the tribute was also registered on the diplomas awarded to the winners of the Games.

The unification of Cypriot football, and Cypriot sports in general, occurred when the athletes and associations realized that the promotion of Cypriot sports could not be achieved under conditions of discord. In a period when the Greek Civil War had ended, and the political forces of the island were all in favour of ‘Enosis’, the reasons that contributed to the 1948 separation were no longer valid. Therefore, it became apparent that unity was the only appropriate way to put an end to the financial problems encountered by the various sports clubs and associations. It was clear that such a change would improve the performance of the athletes, the conditions under which they trained, and, by extent, the development of sports.

The author analyses the circumstances under which the unification took place, which, as he states, was an imperative and the only factual option for the Cyprus Amateur Football Federation ΚΕΠΟ [Κυπριακή Ερασιτεχνική Ποδοσφαιρική Ομοσπονδία]. The book also claims that there were no initiatives to change the composition of the gymnastics clubs, and that many teams were rejected from playing in the first and second division for other than sporting criteria. Considering these facts, as the author claims, a true unification in sports was never achieved.

Finally, as already mentioned, an important element of the book is its rich photographic material, which includes clippings of articles from newspapers, copies of the founding statutes, and the diplomas that were awarded. The published images illustrate various aspects of the sports history of Cyprus, as this is laid out in the book’s 247 pages. Also, the book introduces all those individuals who starred in the sports life of Cyprus, as well as those who were pioneers in the promotion of sports. The book is an integral part of the Cypriot literature for the 1940s, and an essential reading for all interested in the history of Cypriot sports.

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