New Books in Sports Interview with Heather Dichter

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Hello colleagues,

I am writing to let you know about my latest New Books in Sports interview with Heather Dichter, Associate Professor of Sports History and Sports Management at the International Centre for Sports History and Culture at De Montfort University. She is also the author of *Bidding for the 68 Olympic Games: International Sport’s Cold War Battle with NATO* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2021). In our conversation, we discussed the origins of the East German sporting travel ban, the NATO alliance and the competition to host the 1968 Summer and Winter Olympics, and the role of smaller NATO members in reshaping the alliance’s border and travel regulations.

Please find the URL here: [https://newbooksnetwork.com/bidding-for-the-1968-olympic-games](https://newbooksnetwork.com/bidding-for-the-1968-olympic-games)

In *Bidding for the 68 Olympic Games*, Dichter examines a little-known and understudied until now diplomatic conflict between NATO and the International Olympic Committee. In the 1950s and 1960s, NATO members struggled to balance their adherence to the Hallstein Doctrine - non-recognition of state-symbols of East Germany - with their participation in and desire to host sports mega-events. The Hallstein doctrine limited travel for East German athletes, who could only participate as members of a club or a German team, as well as banned the inclusion of the East German anthem or flag in public. The IOC’s strict claims to apoliticism and their demand that all athletes be allowed to travel to competitions made NATO’s obstruction of East German travel unpopular and untenable. In the press, NATO members pointed to the Berlin Wall as the ultimate barrier to free travel, but behind the scenes and then later in public, the alliance’s solidarity threatened to crumble as Canada, France, and the United States competed for the right to host the Olympic Games.

Although the East German travel ban featured in press commentary about the 1968 Olympics, most histories of Cold War sports overlook this crucial moment in European sport. Dichter’s work moves beyond previous histories through an extensive analysis of a wide range of archives across multiple countries, including the United States, Canada, France, Switzerland, Germany and Norway. Her
research includes not only newspapers, but more importantly diplomatic documents from NATO, NATO alliance members, and the IOC that enable her to better understand the diplomatic strategies pursued by the competing interests: nation-states, military alliances, sporting bodies, athletic federations and even athletes. Only through this transnational and multi-archival approach can Dichter illustrate the importance that NATO members placed on sport and explain why sport proved so difficult for them to handle despite broad agreement in other diplomatic arenas.

*The Bidding for the 68 Olympic Games* is a fascinating account of a largely unknown and poorly understood conflict between NATO and a range of international sporting organizations, including the International Olympic Committee. It will appeal to people interested in sport, international diplomacy, and the Cold War.

Keith Rathbone is a Senior Lecturer at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia. He researches twentieth-century French social and cultural history. His book, entitled *Sport and physical culture in Occupied France: Authoritarianism, agency, and everyday life*, out now with Manchester University Press, examines physical education and sports in order to better understand civic life under the dual authoritarian systems of the German Occupation and the Vichy Regime. If you have a title to suggest for this podcast, please contact him at keith.rathbone@mq.edu.au and follow him at @keithrathbone on twitter.