

Hans Bonde: *Fodbold med fjenden. Dansk idræt under hagekorset*.  
Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag 2006, 498 S.

Hans Bonde: *Football with the Foe. Danish Sport under the Swastika*.  
Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark 2008, 272 P.

In 2007 a book by Hans Bonde about sporting history, *Fodbold med fjenden*, won the Danish History Book of the Year award. In 2008, the book was published in English under the title “Football with the foe,” in a reworked and heavily abbreviated translation. The author is professor of sports history at the University of Copenhagen and has already published several books on the subject. This book’s thesis arose out of a master’s thesis by one of Bonde’s former students, Martin Frey, and Bonde was partly assisted by Frey in writing the book.

The book, which is very well-written and well-documented, is likely to become the standard work on the relationship between Danish and German organized sports during the German occupation of Denmark. The occupation itself lasted from 1940 to 1945. The athletic cooperation, however, lasted only about one year – from August 1940 until the autumn of 1941, when the Germans abandoned it

after fighting broke out between Danish and German spectators in the stands. It was only after pressure from the Danish Foreign Ministry and the German occupation forces on the somewhat hesitant sport functionaries that the cooperation began. By the end of 1941, this sporting cooperation was no longer a useful indicator of the good relations between Denmark and Germany.

Football is, as the title of the book suggests, a major focus. However, Bonde also goes into great detail on a wide range of other sports. The subject has been dealt with before in Danish sports history, but this new book is the first thorough investigation of the role of Danish sports during the occupation. It tries to answer the question, “How did Danish organized sports (in the book understood as the leadership of the Danish Sports Confederation and its members, the federations) handle the German occupation?”

The book has four theses which are analyzed and discussed very thoroughly:

a) During the 1930s, a general goodwill in athletic politics with Germany developed.

b) Danish athletic leaders played an active role in organizing and running this athletic cooperation with the Germans.

c) This athletic cooperation was the most extensive cultural cooperation between Denmark and Germany during the war.

d) Organized sports legitimized this cooperation by invoking a belief in sport's apolitical nature.

The book deals with the classic moral dilemma of Danish occupation history: Was it right to cooperate with the Germans and if so, how far could one go?

The historiography of organized Danish sports policy during the war can be divided into two existing schools with regards to the general history of the Danish-German relationship in that period. The majority of historians (and politicians) claim that the cooperation policy was the most sensible one, the only correct one, or even the only possible one under the prevailing circumstances. This view takes as its main point of departure the fact that the defence policy conducted during the

1930s had left Denmark with virtually no defence forces. All in all, the policy of cooperation meant that the German occupying power did not get directly involved in Danish society for the first years of the occupation. Others, however, emphasize that the policy of cooperation was misguided, first and foremost because it was morally wrong. It left the task of combating Hitler to others, while "we" in Denmark on the "Whipped Cream Front" lived the good life and compromised excessively in our submission to Nazism.

Hans Bonde's new book also takes as its starting point the view that, despite certain blemishes, the government's policy of cooperation was sensible under the circumstances, and he states early on that the book is based on the acceptance that there is no one formula for correct moral conduct during occupation. However, while the earlier literature on the subject argues that organized sports acted sensibly with respect to the official government policy, it is Bonde's belief that the functionaries made significant mistakes. The organizations crossed a moral line, if not a legal one. In brief, while it may have been necessary to sell butter to Germany in order to receive raw materials in return and avoid economic catastrophe, hunger, and adversity, it was not necessary to play football with the occupying power.

Every country involved in World War II has developed its own narrative about it. In the larger belligerent countries this narrative is bound up with the war itself. The Danish narrative perceives “World War II” and “the occupation” as two distinct phenomena, and historical accounts have primarily dealt with the occupation. In Denmark, April 9, 1940 (occupation) and May 5, 1945 (liberation) are overwhelmingly seen as the most decisive dates in the history of the war. The war itself is chronicled as a kind of backdrop, which confirms events happening in Denmark, rather than the reverse. One of the central elements of the Danish narrative of the war relates to the policy of cooperation from 1940 to 1943.

*Fodbold med fjenden* positions itself in a wave of interest over the past decade for new aspects of the history of the occupation. This wave has brought many new works into the historical spotlight: “Danish industry’s production of weapons for Germany,” “The liquidation of informers,” “Volunteers on the Eastern Front” and “Danish workers in Germany,” among others. These studies share a common feature: to a substantial extent, they are critical towards and have challenged the previous history of the occupation. The writers have not necessarily challenged the policy of cooperation in itself, but have challenged the idea that the policy was the collective expression

of a nation standing more or less united against the Nazis until August 1943, when the resistance movement took over. Over the past ten years a process of self-criticism and self-reflection has been set in motion with regards to the history of the Danish occupation. In many ways this has altered our view of the occupation period and has thereby changed Denmark’s perception of itself. For the first 50 years after liberation, the intent of historiography of the occupation was, first and foremost, to sanitize the history of the occupation. A somewhat whitewashed picture of Denmark standing shoulder to shoulder against the German occupation was pretty much universal. Only Nazis and traitors had stood outside the united national front. This self-portrait has now been substantially altered and is consistently changing to make place for a desire to acknowledge that another less attractive narrative is very possible. This is a narrative about a “system” almost everyone participated in and which could only be crushed by the allies’ campaign and final victory over Germany.

The motivation behind Bondes and many of the new studies and their conclusions is as much a will to delve deeply and to take a self-critical stance as it is the desire to try to learn “something else” from and about the occupation period. Here we have, all things considered, something in the nature of a paradigm shift. It is not

easy to find a precise cause for this reorientation. According to the historian Claus Bryld, it is, generally speaking, the end of the Cold War that has made it mentally possible to cast a more self-critical, introspective gaze towards the history of the occupation period. That event marked the end of the time when the major systems in the East and the West respectively laid down the framework for our ways of perceiving history.

Of course, the sources relating to the occupation period have not radically changed. If anything, they have become more accessible. This can be seen, for example, in the new book by Bonde. The book does indeed contribute a large quantity of new information, especially as to the role and conduct of the top sports functionaries, but one could argue that this is information that could have also been interpreted within the framework of the traditional narrative. All things considered it is, after all, the case that once Danish athletic cooperation with the Germans had been set in motion, there were certain decisions that were morally questionable. This is particularly true if we are considering the period 1940–43 with the benefit of hindsight. After all, the new material that has so deservedly been presented in the new book does not contribute anything decisively new to the subject of the functionaries' moral conduct during the occupation. No smoking

gun has been unearthed. What we have here is, first and foremost, a reinterpretation of existing knowledge.

The book *Fodbold med fjenden / Football with the Foe* is, however, an impressive piece of work and is a must-read for anyone who wants to gain insight into Danish-German athletic relations during the occupation.

*Per Jørgensen (Odense)*