

## SPORTS DAILY FACES NEW PROBLEMS

**Author(s):**

JODY MEACHAM, Mercury News Staff Writer

**Date:** February 4, 1992

**Section:** Sports

MOSCOW – Evgeny Teptzov, like many Muscovites, is eager for the Winter Olympics to begin, but he has one worry.

“I’m afraid my TV set will melt,” said the rabid sports fan.

Sports is a passion among Russians and in other republics of the new Commonwealth of Independent States. And when the Games are not on television, subscribers such as Teptzov will read about them in *Sovietsky Sport*, the Russian-language daily that’s the largest sports newspaper in the world.

*Sovietsky Sport* covers everything from soccer in Smolensk to hockey in San Jose. The NHL roundup on a recent Page 3 covered the Sharks’ 4-1 loss to the Vancouver Canucks and gave Doug Wilson’s vote totals for the NHL All-Star Game.

From a rundown office building next door to the only remaining synagogue in Moscow, with a view of the former headquarters of the Communist Party’s Central Committee and a short walk from the KGB building on Lubyanska Square, the paper’s 80 editors and writers turn out four pages a day in addition to a weekly section sold separately called Plus Eight.

From 52 printing plants scattered across the old Soviet Union, 2 million copies of the daily are sent to subscribers across the former Soviet Union and 500,000 are printed for single-copy sales at newsstands. Plus Eight sells an additional 348,000 copies.

Those are the kind of numbers that would make any U.S. publisher rich but which keep copy, worrying in the office until nearly midnight.

“To run this newspaper is a great problem,” he says.

As with the editor of any other Moscow publication, the old days sometimes seem like the good old days.

Under communism, money was no object. All an editor had to do was fill his pages with news that promoted the party line and he got his paycheck.

In the new commonwealth – and despite a heavy demand for his product – Kudryavtzev's paper faces financial losses, a shortage of newsprint and probable Moscow.

The single-copy price jumped from 75 kopecks to a ruble in January – an increase of one-third – and will double to 2 rubles when the Winter Olympics begin Saturday. Since Russian President Boris Yeltsin abandoned most price controls last month, the cost of the newsprint Kudryavtzev buys from three paper mills has risen 10 to 20 times the previous levels.

Subscribers' last renewal notices listed a price but no term, and many newsstands are refusing to sell the newspaper because the rising cost has erased their profits.

"I have no profit," Kudryavtzev says. "The economic problems are of most importance. Certainly we will follow the way other newspapers are going and publish advertising, but it will violate tradition."

Another source of funds, Kudryavtzev hopes, will be joint ventures with foreign newspapers to print sports news of interest to communities of immigrants of the former USSR.

He says he will be laying off his production staff of 80 workers and contract out those jobs. The editorial staff faces layoffs as well.

"Last spring I was called a capitalist shark because I separated the creative and writing staff from the business staff. I think that journalists are of more importance for a newspaper, so I decided not to sign a contract with the business staff. Maybe this is Russian capitalism.

"I will limit the number of staff to teach them the lesson of responsibility."

With a three-month supply of newsprint already purchased because he foresaw Yeltsin's action, Kudryavtzev can do some of the fun work of journalism, which is deciding what to put in the newspaper. His formula is simple.

There is soccer, a health and recreation page, soccer, a page for "sport literature," which are long feature stories, and more soccer.

In its literature section, *Sovietsky Sport* recently did a long piece on boxer Muhammad Ali – “A Lip from Louisville” – as well as on aviator Charles Lindbergh and Russian dissident Andrei Sakharov, “because they approached life like sportsmen.”

The current hard times in the Commonwealth of Independent States have not dampened sports enthusiasm. Kudryavtzev said *Sovietsky Sport's* circulation has declined 12 percent in the current depression compared with the 40 percent losses of such non-sports papers as *Pravda* and *Trud*.

“Olympic sports will never face a problem (in Russia),” he said. “But we have problems of a different character among children and people in sport. In this sphere, it’s people who play. Now we will see what are the values of our people.”

Copyright (c) 1992 San Jose Mercury News