

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT EDELMAN

Rafael Fortes¹

Abstract Robert Edelman is a professor at the University of California, San Diego's Department of History, where he teaches Russian and Soviet history and the history of sport. In this interview, which took place at his UCSD office on June 6, 2016, he speaks about his career, sports history, reminiscences about his past as a sports fan, and as a politically active student in the 1960s, and his numerous research trips to the Soviet Union/Russia.

Keywords: Sport History; Historiography; USSR; USA; Arquivar research.

Entrevista com Robert Edelman

Resumo Robert Edelman é professor do Departamento de História da University of California, San Diego (UCSD), onde leciona história da Rússia, da União Soviética e do esporte. Nesta entrevista, realizada em seu gabinete na UCSD em 6 de junho de 2006, ele fala sobre sua carreira, história do esporte, reminiscências de seu passado como torcedor e militante estudantil nos anos 1960, e suas numerosas viagens para realizar pesquisas na União Soviética/Rússia.

Palavras-chave: História do Esporte; Historiografia; URSS. EUA; Pesquisa em arquivos.

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Rafael Fortes: Bob, tell a bit about your undergraduate and graduate studies and how you got interested in researching sports.

Robert Edelman: That actually happened late in my career. So, if you want to talk about my early career, it had nothing to do professionally with sports.

I grew up in New York City, specifically Brooklyn, and, like a lot of places in America, sport was very important. One of the most famous baseball teams, at that time, was the Brooklyn Dodgers, now they are the Los Angeles Dodgers, and their stadium was located half a mile from our house. So, probably starting at the age of seven, my father would take me, but even before that, he would play baseball with me.

But the real big sport in New York was always basketball. By the time I was eight or nine, I started to play that. I had a problem with my eyes, which made it difficult for me to play games on the street: stickball, punchball. It took a while for me to find some way as an athlete, even though I wasn't very good.

So sport was something I always cared a lot about. I cared a lot about professional football at that time. I was a big fan of the New York Giants. I went with my younger brother to Yankee Stadium, where they played football, actually.

None of that had anything particularly to do with my education. I was an undergraduate and I majored in International Affairs. I went to Princeton. Within that there's the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. I thought I was going to be a broadcast journalist. I wanted to do Russia as my area of specialty, because it was the height of the Cold War, and possibly understanding this other part of the world could contribute to world peace.

The other side of it was that it was a revolutionary state, or it claimed to be that at that time. My parents were involved in fairly far left politics. At that time, I was part of SDS [Students for a Democratic Society], the anti-war student movement and the civil rights movement, so I was interested in studying revolutionary states.

Then I went to the Soviet Union in 1965 and it turned out it wasn't all that perfect. Additionally when I went there in 1965 I met some of the correspondents with the big networks. At that point there were only three of them. None of them spoke Russian. None of them had been trained in anything particularly to do with Russia. They were trained as news gatherers. So two things became clear to me. One, that studying Russian was not the way to become a correspondent in Russia for a major TV network. The other thing was, politically, at that point, it took a while for the big networks to turn against the [Vietnam] war. That kind of happened in '68, '69, by that time, I was in graduate school. I graduated in 1966. So, at that point, it was not fashionable or mainstream to be against the war. So I understood that, if I was going to work for one of these networks, one: it wasn't about knowing a lot about Russia; two, you couldn't really be an opponent of the war and work for those networks at that time. That would change.

The other thing that concerned me was that professors with whom I was studying, a lot of them had literally worked for the CIA, although I didn't know it at the time. Others were openly tied to the State Department. Political science was something that I thought I would be interested in, but it turned out, when I tried to take courses, I didn't know what was happening. I was more interested and more comfortable doing History. In the last part of my senior year I switched and I went to graduate school at Columbia in Russian and European history.

That was kind of a mixed bag in terms of experience, but I was being trained very well to do pre-revolutionary Russian history. At that time, if you were on the New Left, you were not that comfortable in studying Soviet history, because a lot of that was pretty tragic and sad and unpleasant, and we thought we were in some kind of pre-revolutionary moment. We wanted to elaborate on how that happened in a place where it actually occurred, like Russia. So that had a lot to do with why I was studying Russia at that time.

After that, how did you get into researching sports?

I had published two conventional social-political histories of pre-revolutionary Russia.² The other thing is that a bunch of people here at UCSD were interested in sports. There were lots of sports fans in the History Department. One of them, professor [Paul G.] Pickowicz, of Chinese history, had a friend in the public relations office of the university. His second job was to cover professional sports in San Diego for the Associated Press. He covered basketball, because there was a professional basketball team here for a while, and baseball as well. Sometimes I helped him out with baseball, but the real area of my expertise, in which he was not so strong, was basketball. So every night, if there was a game in town, I was in the front row, at the press table, and when it was over, I was going to the locker rooms, I interviewed these guys. It was wonderful. I had a great time.

In '86, this friend of mine who had taught here, Harry Scheiber, who had moved to Berkeley, was talking to some guy from Stanford and they said that they were organizing a conference on sport, culture and society. They had decided that sport was something OK to allow into their academy. It was also the time of Perestroika. The Soviet Union was really big at that time and they wanted to have something on Soviet sport. There was nobody – in America, at least – that was doing it. There was one person in Great Britain, a guy named James Riordan. So my friend recommended me because I knew about Russia and about sports.

I agreed to do the paper. I decided I was going to do it on Soviet spectator sport, which ended up being the topic of my book, and the

² EDELMAN, Robert. *Gentry Politics on the Eve of the Russian Revolution: The Nationalist Party, 1905-1917*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1980.
 EDELMAN, Robert. *Proletarian Peasants: The Revolution of 1905 in Russia's Southwest*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.

thematic, or the big question was: “Soviet spectator sport: Stalinism or good clean fun?”. So, to study it, I did two things. One is that I had a subscription to *Sovetskii Sport*, which was the national sports daily, which would come on a two week delay.

Also, the Rand Institute, a big think tank in Santa Monica... They were founded in the early Cold War and they had a lot of money from the Air Force to do counterinsurgency research. They did a lot of research about the Soviet Union, in order to make sure there was not another revolution elsewhere. Now they’ve kind of moved more to the political center. They put up a huge satellite dish on their roof in Santa Monica, to get Soviet television. It had a crazy cost, I think it was US\$ 100,000. Soviet television was not uninteresting. It was not as boring or propagandistic as you might think it was. And we know this now because a lot of scholars have been able to do research on it. So I can’t remember if they got one or both channels. They would record games, sports news and things like that for me on cassette.

Between the newspapers and the TV, I was able to get a decent idea of what spectator sports were like. So I gave this paper at Stanford, and it wasn’t well received. They didn’t think it was particularly interesting. I gave the same paper a week later at a conference on popular culture in Eastern Europe, that was at Indiana University, and it was a big success.

So I was just finishing my second book at that point, which is about peasants in Ukraine in 1905. It was pleasurable to read the Soviet sports pages. The joke was that I could do my research while lying on my back, reading the newspapers. [laughs] When I got these cassettes they let me take them home and I put them in the VCR. My wife would come in and say “what are you doing?” and I’d say “I’m working!”. [laughs] It was a good excuse. It was pleasurable! So I was collecting all this material, but was not sure what to do with it.

I had a friend who taught at Michigan and said: “Why don’t you come to Michigan, it is 1989, and talk about this?”. So I put something together, I gave this talk and a lot of really terrific, wonderful, smart people showed up. One of them was Geoff Eley. My other friend, whose name is Ronald Suny, said “this is really great, you should write a book about this”. Then I decided I was going to do that and it should be a history book, not just a book about Perestroika.

The library here was good enough to buy me a microfilm of the entire run of *Sovetskii sport*, from 1946 to 1989. So I began to work my way methodically through that.

Then in 1990 I got money to go to the Soviet Union, some of it was from here [UCSD], some was from the International Research and Exchange Board. I worked in the library of *Sovetskii Sport*. It was a great experience, these reporters allowed me to follow them around.

They started publishing *Sovetskii sport*’s predecessor, *Krasnyi Sport (Red Sport)*, in 1924. All of it was in bound copies, no microfilm. It was great, I was able to read the whole thing, starting in 1924. I read every issue from *Sovetskii sport*. It was really fun to do. I focused on the truly popular games, football, hockey and later basketball. That gave

rise to this book *Serious Fun*,³ which came out in '93, at a time when sports history was really just beginning. I mean, the sub-field had existed since 1950, but it was very internalist and narrowly empirical, not at all theoretical. Sports historians talked to each other, but they didn't know how to talk to the larger profession. So I kind of took it as my purpose to make sports history as relevant to the larger historical profession as I could. Because it had been seen as marginal up to this point, I can't begin to tell you how many times I felt that I shot myself in the foot as far as a career choice. [laughs]

So the book comes out, it gets really good reviews, won a couple of prizes, but it didn't change the world. It came out at the same time as a lot of books, like Elliott Gorn's book on American boxing, John Hoberman's book on sport and political ideology and Steven Riess' and Melvin Adelman's writing on American sport, in theoretically informed ways.

Usually what happened was, the people who were doing that kind of sports history, the kind that you and I take for granted now, were people who would sort of establish themselves as historians, and then had a career change as I had. They then shifted. So it tended to be social historians coming out of a radical tradition, who were using even more updated versions of Marxism to make sense of sport as one form of popular culture. This whole question of the relationship of popular culture through politics was sort of our central area of concern.

At least for me, but for others as well, Marxism was a starting point. The way Marxism eventually evolved from the Frankfurt School, which was very anti-popular culture and not at all comfortable with sport, to the sort of more Gramscian notion of cultural hegemony, that was adopted for the Anglophone world by Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams and the Birmingham school. That for me was a big shift, because you could be a radical and you could do sports. Back in the day, in the 1960s, when I was a graduate student at Columbia, you didn't talk about it, right?

Or tv, or popular media etc.

Yeah, it was just starting. It was just at the point when university scholars were teaching about film. And it was a struggle to have film taken seriously. The idea that you would include a movie in your class was seen as just pandering and lazy. There was nothing to be learned with that. Everything had to be hard to acquire, painful, written and probably boring. [laughs] And so these were things that we were not comfortable with.

Also, there were some very good bibliographers and librarians who understood that it was important to collect all of this material. Because it was a struggle, if you went to the library here at one point in time, and you were looking for somebody's basic books, they were not in our library, because no one was buying them. People who were buying

³ EDELMAN, Robert. *Serious Fun: A History of Spectator Sports in the USSR*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

the books tended to be professors, who told the library what to buy, and professors were not telling them to buy books about boxing, or soccer. These were not things that you and I would think politically, culturally, sociologically implicated. So I think that battle has been won.

The other thing that occurred right at the time my book came out, the first book [*Serious Fun*], was that the historical profession took the cultural turn. Several lines of thought went into that shift. One is the Birmingham School. The other is Foucault and the centrality of the body, with sport being an important bodily activity. Although I don't know if Foucault picked up quite on the sporting parts of his concern with the body. But certainly someone like Pierre Bourdieu, who's been very important for me. He writes in the late twentieth century, but it was kind of a twentieth-first century version of Marxism, it's about hierarchy, social class (even though it's not about material production, modes of production, that sort of thing), the notion of cultural capital, all of that. So I was able to pick some of those ideas, to apply them to sport, and it had a bit of traction, and things were OK. But my intention had been at that point to go back to so-called "real" history. I was going to write a book about peasants in 1917.

At the point, my book came out, my kids showed up. We ended up having three kids within a year. We had adopted a baby girl and then we had twin boys seven months later. So there wasn't much scholarship that was done during the 1990s. By the time they get old enough, which is about '98-'99, and were going to school, I was actually able to sleep. [laughs] And I thought: "What am I going to do now"? I'd had given some thought to writing about masculinity and gender, and I went to some conferences where that was discussed. There were all these younger scholars who knew all aspects of gender theory and I knew nothing of that literature, so I was right behind the eight ball, and I decided to go back and do sports. I fastened on this other part of my passion, which was my favorite Soviet soccer team. I decided I was going to write this history of Spartak.⁴

It turned out that I couldn't write the history of Spartak without talking about masculinity and gender! [laughs] Every one of these topics has involved some kind of job retraining. So the Spartak book turned out, I spent a lot of time in the Soviet archives, and I got it done.

The other thing is that in the Soviet Union, sport as a serious academic topic, just wasn't done. You go to the Soviet Academy of Scientist, to their Institute of History, and nobody's working on this. The only places they're doing it is on what is now the Russian State University of Physical Culture and Sport, the old and famous Institute of Physical Culture. There were people working on the technology of sport, how to coach, psychology, and things around it. But the history of sport that they were doing was completely empirical, untheoretical, and not engaged in the kind of big social questions that you and I are interested in. That was difficult, because then you had this problem where the traditional Russian *intelligentsia* was also very old school and

⁴ EDELMAN, Robert. *Spartak Moscow: A History of the People's Team in the Worker's State*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009.

for them the only kind of culture that was important was high culture. Popular culture was something they looked down on.

I went to the famous Lenin Library, which was the Library of Congress equivalent for the Soviet Union. And you would find these *memoirs* of athletes, or even books that were written by reporters. There were a lot of journalistic books written about sports, some of them are really smart and good. So I go up to the xerox, the copying office. First of all, at that point, there were guys with machine guns protecting the machines. [laughs] Because it was like publishing, and you were not supposed to do that! [laughs] And then, these little *babushki*, these little ladies who were working at the copy desk, they wouldn't let me copy these things. They said: "This is not serious! You call yourself a scholar and you want to read books about soccer?"

So I managed to get through that and when the Spartak book finally came out, things had changed so much, there were so many good histories of other soccer teams, and really great history being done, in England, in particular, on sports history. The moment was right and the book got a lot of attention.

Then I didn't know what I was going to be doing. I had just finished that book and I thought maybe I should write a general history of sport, because there was no kind of textbook. At that point, my kids were teenagers and they were driving me crazy in different ways.

So, just out of the blue, three years ago, I got a phone call from a guy with whom I had worked on a documentary for HBO about the 1972 Olympic basketball final. He calls me up and says "I want to pitch a series of shows about sport in the Cold War to HBO." He asked if I could recommend a book for him to read. I said, "I'll take a look". And it turns out there's no book. There's bits and pieces. Some of it is OK, a lot of it is journalism, some of it is bad journalism, some of it is good. So I decided at that point that I should write this book.

In order to do it, I could handle America, I know that, the archives are down the street, or sort of down the street, right? And I got the Russian archives under control, because I have used a lot of Russian archival material for the Spartak book.

So now, I'm reading about the Cold War, and I realize that just working on the US-Soviet rivalry at the Olympics is insufficient, because you have to look at the rest of the world. I am in the process of making this transition from being a Russian historian to being what is now called a transnational historian. This is challenging in a lot of ways. I'm planning to write this big synthetic book about sports during the Cold War, but to do this I've had to assemble a team of about 50 specialists and we are doing this research project together on sport in the Cold War. Everything that they write will find its way into my book. That's sort of where I am now.

Which languages do you speak?

English, Russian, pretty good French, minimal Ukrainian and minimal Bulgarian.

I'm going back a bit. When did you decide to start learning Russian? How long did it take you to dominate it?

I took Russian in high school, between my junior and senior years, I took a Summer course at Columbia. I studied Russian in college. Then I went there in '65 and realized that I had learned nothing. [laughs] It had nothing to do with the way people were speaking Russian. You know... [laughs] You know how this is, right?

I took some more Russian in my senior year and I started with graduate school. It is a struggle until you can get reasonably good. But I think, realistically, in order to be completely comfortable with it, both spoken and written, I think from the time I started, when I was 16, it was probably somewhere between 36 and 40 years-old that I felt completely comfortable with it. And maybe even a little more in terms of mastering jargon and popular language of fans of sports, nicknames, slang, all of that.

So it took at least 20 years.

I'd think so.

How many times have you been to the Soviet Union/Russia?

More than a hundred. Anywhere from an academic year, several times I've done that; to, when I got married and we had kids, I couldn't go for more than three weeks. I'd go, I'd make a big raid on the archives. People would help me contact the archives, and organize photocopying.

In the old days, when I was not working on sports, if you wanted to see an archive worker have a heart attack, all you had to do was to say the word *photocopying*. You couldn't copy anything. Everything was done by hand. If you found some chart with very important, useful statistics, you had to do it all by hand. You could spend two days just on one set of charts. Then you had to send those notes that you produced – I always made carbon copies. One set I took out, and the other I'd mail through the diplomatic pouch from Moscow to my home in America. So it was a pretty crazy way.

And why did you do that?

In case the notes that I was taking out by hand were confiscated. At one point, I had so many notes I actually put some of them in my all my coat pockets. So the customs guys started looking through all my notes, and just when I thought I had found everything, I kept looking in my other pockets [pats his pockets], and it was all coming out of everywhere. [laughs] They must have thought that I was crazy, but they finally let me through at the airport.

You needed to do that in order to be safe, because people would lose their notes. They would get lost in the mail. Imagine doing one

year's research in the Soviet Union, copying everything by hand, and having it disappear.

Can you tell about the process of obtaining a visa and getting there?

When I was in graduate school, there was only one way to go to the Soviet Union to do research. That is, to be part of the official cultural exchange. The US and the Soviet Union signed a treaty of cultural exchange in 1958. Part of that was every year we would send them 30 American graduate students and they would send 30 people to us. We tended to send people like historians, literature people, occasionally political scientists, maybe the odd anthropologist, very rarely any kind of scientist. All they sent us were scientists. They would apply to do things such as work in the Jet Propulsion Laboratory or work with NASA. That obviously was not gonna happen, but...

In order to do that, and this is an interesting story, you applied to an organization, which initially was based at Indiana University. Eventually, and I'll explain how this happened, it moved to New York. What would happen is that in the '60s, especially at the height of the anti-war and the civil rights movements, when you would apply to this organization, which was run by very conservative, Cold War era types, they sent your name to the FBI. The FBI ran you through their files, to see if you actually had done something dangerous, and they then either brought members of this selection committee to Washington to read that file, or they made a copy of it and sent it to the selection committee. They would make a decision about whether or not you were a safe representative of the United States. If they decided you were a troublemaker – I'd been arrested a few times, and all that –, they would tell you that you had not qualified on academic grounds. So that happened to me in 1968.

And shortly thereafter, that whole relationship between the cultural exchange and the FBI was exposed. The people in Indiana lost control of it, and it moved to a new office in New York City. It was run by different, kind of more centrist, let us say more honest people, and, so, I finally was able to go.

So, then, that's the way you got your visa and you'd get a very generous stipend from the Soviet government and you got to live in dormitory room in Moscow State University, which is this big building just a little to the South from the center of the city. While it was cramped, it was about half the size of this room⁵, there was the bedroom and you shared a bathroom and a toilet with somebody next door. If you were married, which I was at the time, you got both rooms and a suite. So it was not luxurious, there were a lot of cockroaches, sometimes at eight o'clock the electricity stopped. But it wasn't terrible. There were a lot of young people and it was the international wing,

⁵ Edelman refers to his office.

because that's where they had all the microphones, and you met people from all over the world, people I'm still friends with to this day.

That's changed now. Now there's not an official exchange. If you want to go, you just go. It's not that easy to get a visa. You don't just show up, you can't get a tourist visa, that can be very expensive. You have to find some institution that will sponsor you and invite you. Some university, archive or something like that. That can sometimes be tricky, especially if you are looking for a long stay. And then you need to come up with funding, from Fulbright, or you name it. I have been well funded by UCSD. You go there, you spend the money, and you get an apartment, you pay for that out of your pocket, and you do your work.

The other thing that has become much easier is that you can photocopy, and you can use a lot of things that you were not allowed to use beforehand. You were not allowed to see the catalogs. So you'd say: "I'm working on Mensheviks and Moscow before the revolution". They'd say: "All right." And they'd bring you the stuff.

So they decided.

Yes. The only way you could know the reference numbers was to read Soviet historians and look at their footnotes. You'd say "well, fund number 23 looks really important, it gets cited a bunch by such and such guy who has written *the* book on Mensheviks in 1905", or whatever. So you asked for that. And they started to bring stuff out.

The problem would be that they would publish a lot of documents. If you did not know that a document they gave you had already been published, you were toast: "This guy does not know what he's doing, he has not read everything that was available in the West before he showed up". And there's a point to that. You should read everything you could get in your home country before you could go away from there.

I was actually fortunate when I was in graduate school because my mentor had very close relations with Soviet historians. The archive had this rule then that every time a file was used, you had to sign a list of users. If previously a Soviet had never used it, you couldn't see it. So my American mentor, was so tight with these Soviet historians, because he was doing all kinds of favors for them, so these guys would say "ok, what are you going to work on?", and I'd say "I'd like to work on these files". They'd go to the archive, they'd order those files, they'd sign the list of users, not that they'd read it, but then the file was there available for me. This was the way things worked in the real world of the Soviet Union.

So the first time I went for a long time was on that exchange, run by the International Research and Exchange Board. Until the collapse that was the only way to get there. Now there's Airbnb... you name it. [laughs]

When was the last time you went there?

I was just there in May, now. They had the first of our Cold War history sessions. It was sponsored by the German Historical Institute. It was held in the building of the Higher School of Economics, which is like the London School of Economics for Russia. It was great. They did an incredibly good job of organizing it. They got us the visas, they found this great place to hold it, they organized the food, and when it was all over, we hopped on the metro and went out to see Spartak play at their brand new stadium.

That's great.

Yes, it was.

In which archives have you worked at while there? How was it to have access to the sources? Do you think that being an American had some influence on that? How?

I gave you some sense on how we had to operate in the old days. Today people are willing to work with you, they are willing to be paid to copy things for you.

Back in the early 1990s, they just opened the doors to the archives and everything was available. And if you had three laptops to give to the archives, because they were getting no money at that time, they'd show you anything. So, while I was changing diapers, a lot of my colleagues were over in the archives building their careers and doing fabulous work.

There has been a process of reclassification that's very frustrating. Some documents that have actually been *published* now have been reclassified, even though they have been printed, they're out there for the world to see. It's nuts! It's very difficult to get into the FSB, the secret police archives. You could in the early 1990s. Now it's very difficult.

I have developed pretty good relationships with the State Archive of the Russian Federation, where I've always worked. The written records of the Sport Committee are there, from beginning to end. They're very useful and people are willing to let you work on that, and they'd let you see the catalogs and albums and everything they did let you see in the past.

The other place I did work a lot is the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History, which is the Central Committee archive for everything up to 1953, which is when Stalin died.

And there's something called the Russian Archive of Contemporary History, that's in a different building and that's for the Central Committee after 1953. The person who runs that is the scholar who has written the only academic respectable Russian language work on Soviet sport. He and I are pals and I've cultivated that relationship. He has helped me magnificently. Back in the old days, having that kind of relationship with somebody was called "socialist contacts". [laughs] That's how it was done.

Can you say more on how was it to work in the archives? How did you take notes? Anything to add on that?

Once it was possible to make copies, you would order files based upon looking at the catalogs. The other thing I had going for me in the Spartak book is this guy Vartanyan, who had worked in everything there was to see. He would say “oh, yeah, you look here, and you look here, and you look here, you order the following things”. So I really knew where I was going once I got there, and that made them respect me. They didn’t know I was being told what to do precisely. [laughs]

So the file would come, I would sit there with a pad and I would write down the file numbers and all that. Then I would scan them, and if there was something that looked interesting, I would make note of the topic. Then I had this assistant who I paid, who kind of organized that process with the archive. I’d pay him in dollars and he’d get the copying. I’d pick it up and take it out of the country. It wasn’t hard at all. That’s what I’ve done since.

Before you were allowed to make copies, how long did it take you to have enough material for an article or a book?

An academic year was enough to get a dissertation. When it came time to turn that dissertation into a book, I spent another academic year five years later. That’s with everything done by hand. It has become possible to be more efficient now.

The other thing I did at one point, this was very early on, they had these hand held copiers. This was 1990, so you put in paper, you ran it down a column, then I’d staple all the columns together, put the dates and the newspaper on the back of these literally strands of paper. I did a lot of that for the first sports book. The Spartak book was much more straightforward.

Now people just go in there with their smartphones and iPads.

Anything to add on how did historians within the US regard your work when those books came out?

What was really important is that the Spartak book won the prize for the best work of history given by the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies. On any topic, not just sports. That was the key. All of a sudden, people paid attention, like, my hair turned gray, people took me seriously. [laughs] But it was a long struggle to get respectability.

The first thing I published on Spartak was in 2002 in the *American Historical Review*.⁶ That’s a big deal to get in there. It’s very hard. They send it out to ten different peer-reviewers. So that got in

⁶ EDELMAN, Robert. A Small Way of Saying No: Spartak Soccer, Moscow Men and the Communist Party, 1900-1945. *The American Historical Review*, vol. 107, n. 5, p. 1441-1474, December 2002.

there. Four years later, I got a Guggenheim [John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Grant]. Recently for this Cold War project we got a big grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. So, when those things are happening, you've kind of turned the corner. People now understand that this is really an important human activity, it can tell you a lot about the human condition.

It seems to me that many sport scholars in the Humanities who speak English as their primary language do not learn a second language. Sometimes, scholarship in other languages is treated as non-existent. I would like to have some thoughts from you on the relevance of knowing a second language.

Now you can't. I mean, if you are working on Brazilian sport and you don't know Portuguese you are bullshit, right? Same thing with Russian sport, with Chinese sport, if you are an American. Americans have this huge advantage because now it's the language of international discourse.

The only way that you can possibly get away with not speaking a foreign language is if you are doing American history. So, in this department [UCSD's Department of History] there is nobody studying a foreign country who does not know that language. You cannot do original research unless you have that language under control. That's just a given. So, maybe in other social sciences, somehow, some people can get away with it.

But I'll give you a sense: this institution doesn't understand that. Why do I say that? A few years ago, the chancellor – another chancellor [not the one in office right now] – invited me to give a talk to some wealthy donors. It was a dinner. He gets up and he says: “We're building the greatest research institution, and we are going to have the number one person in the world, if we get the second one that's not going to be good enough, blah, blah, blah”. So it's research, research, research. Then the next guy to speak was the dean of humanities, he says “Professor Edelman is in Humanities, he's a specialist in Russia, Russia this, Russia that”, then I give my little talk about Russia. I sit down next to the chancellor, we are having dinner. He says: “Tell me something: do you speak Russian?”. [laughs]

Looking back at your career: how important was this for you? I mean, dealing with sources on a language other than yours.

It's crucial. It's fundamental. If you don't have the master of that, specially in something like sport, where language is so important, you are nowhere. I honestly think that had I not been able to study sport *after* I had mastered Russian, if I started out with weaker Russian, I would never have the kind of results that I had.

Do you stimulate the students you supervise to learn other languages? Do they seem interested in that?

Graduate students know that you have to. I'm going to have a graduate student coming here next year from London. He's a Brit, he's working on German and Eastern European soccer. He understands completely that he has to have that under control as far as German. Otherwise it is not serious.

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