

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

„1 DECEMBER 1918” UNIVERSITY ALBA IULIA

Doctoral School of History

**Transylvania and Banat associations and sports clubs,
in the interwar period (1919-1939).**

Domestic and international activity

Adviser

CS. I dr. Marius Rotar

PhD student

Ciprian Marinuț

Alba Iulia, 2021

The development of the sports movement was one of the most important characteristics of the interwar period in Romania, and Transylvania and Banat were two of the regions with the greatest importance and influence from this perspective. The idea of choosing this research topic arose as a result of my interest in sports and sports clubs, which is due to my first passion - football and my first profession - as sports journalist. The links between journalism and history are obvious to the representatives of both guilds. One of the first ideas that is passed on to students during journalism school is that journalism is a type of history of the moment. And the comparison between the work of the journalist and that of the historian is easy to understand and very realistic. A collection of stories of the moment, recorded by journalists, can become history, when enough time has passed, when the information in those articles tells the story of events that were representative. Moreover, the working methodology is similar in historical research and journalistic investigation. The questions Who? What? When? Where? How? Why? are the same ones for both trades. They are the ones that the historian must ask in his attempt to establish the historical facts, but also the questions the journalist uses in order to write news or a story that records the history of the moment.

Another reason for choosing this research topic is the extraordinary development of Romanian sport in the interwar period and its transformation from a strange and incomprehensible activity into a major social phenomenon. A graphic illustration of just how "strange" the sport was in some regions of Romania, in the interwar period, is an article published in 1931 that presents an incident that a tall, handsome officer, a real Hercules went through. This particular soldier, who was among others a national record holder in pentathlon, moved from a more developed sports environment in Bistrița to a small town in Moldova. There, he was on the verge of being beaten by the locals, on the grounds that he was crazy, because he ran on the street "skimpily" dressed, holding a spear and a disc, when he was returning from training on the hills. The officer was saved from the hands of the locals who thought he was crazy because he was running, only because he was recognized by some soldiers from his unit who happened to pass by¹.

Personally, I have always lived and devoured sports, so I chose with all my heart, wanting to do a study that involved what I was passionate about. The research topic was outlined organically, but also in line with the recommendations of the historical research methodology, to sports associations and clubs in Transylvania and Banat, analyzed and researched in terms of sports regionalism and national and international activity.

¹ R., *Ca la noi la nimeni*, în *Gazeta sporturilor*, 25 aprilie 1931, p. 1.

The purpose of this paper is to draw the general and specific framework about the life of sports associations and clubs in Transylvania and Banat, between 1919-1939, by identifying their roots and by presenting the activity and performance of the main clubs and best athletes. Moreover, the intention is to point out that among the societies, clubs and sports associations in Romania, those in Transylvania and Banat were at the forefront throughout the interwar period. Another hypothesis of the paper is that the associations, societies and sports clubs from Transylvania and Banat played a decisive role in the emergence, consolidation and development of Romanian sport. In particular, during the interwar period, one of beginnings for Romanian sport, the clubs from Transylvania and Banat were the ones who set the tone, achieved the performances of that period and projected the successes of the future. Also, the activity of clubs in Transylvania and Banat was richer and more efficient than those in other regions of the country, the clubs within the Carpathian arc being superior in organization, representation at national and international level and results compared to rivals in the Old Kingdom.

Considering there is a relative bibliographic scarcity, the main source of information of this work was the newspapers that were published during that time. The approach of establishing the historical facts from the life and activity of sports associations and clubs in Transylvania and Banat began with the use of information from various academical papers or general publications that appeared at that time in Transylvania and had sports columns. The in-depth study, analysis, explanations and verification of the initial hypotheses were supported by the informative content offered by numerous articles, chronicles, news and editorials about the teams from Transylvania and Banat published in the specialized newspapers *Ecoul Sportiv*, *Gazeta Sporturilor* and *Universul Sport*, but also in other generalist publications that appeared in the interwar period. Most of these topics addressed and analyzed in the paper can be associated in one way or another with the major areas of research in the history of sport identified by Allen Guttman, one of the most talented American sports historians. „The Germans, the Italians and to a lesser extent the Japanese wrote extensively about the role of sport in the fascist regime. There have also been numerous efforts to analyze the role of sport in communist societies, and considerable attention has been paid to sport in a working-class environment of the 1920s and 1930s. Many historians, especially, but not exclusively, from South Africa, the USA, Australia, and Ireland, have been concerned with the intersection of sport with politics and with issues of race and ethnicity. European and American historians have also written with considerable passion about politics, sports, and gender

discrimination. The Olympic Games (..) aroused the fifth level of attention from sports historians. A small but prolific group of neo-Marxist German and French historians and sociologists have argued that modern sports are a perfect mirror of capitalist institutions”².

The first chapter of the thesis paints an overview of the historiography of Romanian sport. The emphasis was on the historiography of sport in Transylvania and Banat, but I also made a presentation from an international perspective, in order to open the research horizon even more.

The beginnings of the sports movement in Romania are the subject of the next chapter. The first part of the chapter included the review of the concept of physical education, the concept of sports and the presentation of some landmarks of the beginnings of school physical education in Romania. At the end of the chapter, I analyzed the appearance of the first sports associations and clubs in Romania, the situation of sports in Transylvania and Banat at the beginning of the 20th century, and I also conducted the census of clubs in Transylvania and Banat, in the first part of the 20th century.

Chapter three deals with the image of physical education and sports in the interwar press in Transylvania and Banat. It was easy to notice that the presence of the sport in the newspapers of the time had a timid start and reached a high level with special and permanent columns and pages, going through a lot of turmoil. Then, I found that the sport managed to find its place in the press of the era in part due to the benevolent attitude of the Romanian Royals, and despite some representatives of the churches or interethnic tensions for which the sports field was the scene or the starting point.

The object of chapter four is the presentation of the activity of the clubs from Transylvania and Banat at sports competitions at national and international level. We analyzed the representation and performances of the clubs from Transylvania and Banat at the Olympic Games from the interwar period, as well as at other major international competitions, from the world to the Balkan championships. So, this chapter is the most extensive of this research. I reviewed successes, failures, awards, dramas or scandals in sports such as football, athletics, table tennis, tennis, basketball, wrestling, rugby or gymnastics.

Chapter five is about the specifics of sports life in Transylvania and Banat in the interwar period. Topics such as naivety and initial enthusiasm, ethnic frictions, masked professionalism and

² Allen Guttman, *Sport, Politics and the engaged historian*, in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38, 3, Sport and Politics, 2003, pp. 363-375.

the social aspect of clubs at all levels are approached, in order to present a different image, compared to the one discovered at first sight from the competitions they took part in, on sports in the interwar period. A case study from the perspective of the specifics of interwar sports life is part of this chapter and refers to the Aiud Football District. With a hesitant start marked by poverty and ethnic problems, the Aiud Football District still had most of the specific features of football activity in Transylvania and Banat in the interwar period.

Finally, in Chapter six, I brought into discussion another perspective on the sports life of the time by conducting a comprehensive case study on the activity of football associations and clubs in the Hunedoara region. I presented the important landmarks of the appearance and development of football in Hunedoara, pointing out the participation in the first national competitions, the will to assert the Romanian element, the match of matches of the time with the first team from England that played in Romania. Also, I looked at the feat of the two appearances in Division A managed by Jiul Petroșani and Mica Brad, the solid performance in the second echelon/league. The high degree of representation in the third league were widely analyzed, and the engine to all was the strength of the blue-collar clubs and masked professionalism.

The research findings largely confirmed the hypothesis that sports associations, societies and clubs in Transylvania and Banat played a key role in the sports movement in Romania during the interwar period. There are, of course, nuances and details in relation to this conclusion, as well as elements of the "white spots" domain in terms of aspects of performance. However, it is one hundred percent sure that sports associations, societies, and clubs in Transylvania and Banat have played a pioneering role from many perspectives and in many sports, had an important contribution to performance and had a correct vision of the future.