

SPORT, A DEFINING (AND NOSTALGIC) ELEMENT OF ARAD IN THE PAST

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Abstract. In the sports landscape of Romania, the city of Arad appears as a special phenomenon, perhaps also due to the fact that the practice of sports in this area, as organized associative forms, represents in many cases a first in the Romanian space. We refer here to horse riding, shooting, skating, gymnastics, rowing, fencing, cycling and especially football, which appeared and developed rapidly in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

In Arad, the development of sports was boosted and favored by the impetuous development of the economy and society in the city and the adjacent area, this being also visible in the interwar period.

There was then a good quality press, in Romanian, Hungarian and German, which gave ample space to sports. Besides that, numerous famous personalities of interwar Arad, from different fields, practiced sport, loved it and, as far as possible, supported its deployment, promotion, and development.

Keywords: Arad, sport, interwar, press, personalities

Arad occupies a special place in the sports landscape of Romania, perhaps also due to the fact that the practice of sports in this area, as organized associative forms, in many cases represents a priority in the Romanian space.

We can record in Arad, the appearance of the first Association of horse breeders, in 1826, under the name of "S. Szecseny", who organized for the first time in the town on Mureş a great equestrian competition on October 6, 1828, on a field near the suburban commune of Livada.

Other sports associations and societies were established before 1848, among the most representative being the Citizen Shooting Society - in 1831 (which organized a first competition in 1846, bringing in 1847 the first Winchester repeating firearm known in Arad). Its creator is Baron Orczy Lőrincz, the place chosen being "Pădurea Mică" (today's "Pădurice" Park), located on his estate.

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The newspapers of the time reported that in 1884, during his visit to Arad, Emperor and King Franz Joseph visited the shooting range in Pădurice and tried the weapons. It is said that the ad-hoc marksman Kőver Gábor from Réthát (n.r. New Tisa) would have remarked: "Your Majesty shoots magnificently!". The monarch did not respond to the comment".¹

The shooting society was followed by the Arad Skating Society - in 1874 and the Arad Gymnastics Club - in 1881. In 1860, the Arad Gymnastics Society (reorganized in 1869 and 1879), one of the longest-lasting and strongest sports societies in the city on Mureș, is established. It should be noted that in 1882 the celebration of the association took place in collaboration with the "Gymnastics Meeting from Timișoara". In 1870, the first bicycle in the city was reported in the local press, with a wooden frame and instead of tires, metal circles (it can be seen at the Sports Museum, in Bucharest). The Cycling Association was founded in 1899. The years of the last decade of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century also brought the establishment of other sports entities: the Mureșul Canoeing Society - in 1890, the Arad Equestrian Association - in 1894, the Arad Athletic Club - in 1899 (whose football team played the first official football match on the current territory of Romania, on August 15 of the same year), the Fencing School - in 1902 (with the mention that the French master Valé had already opened a hall of this kind since 1860) or the Chess Circle – in 1905.

At that time sport was only a privilege of the rising bourgeoisie and - needless to say - men: skating, gymnastics, athletics, swimming, bowling, rowing and then cycling. The latter was increasingly popular. At the end of the week, the people of Arad jumped on the "wire donkeys" and pedaled towards the vineyard hills from near Arad. Those with more modest incomes took the train ("The Green Arrow" started for the vineyard "only" in 1906). Go to the Vineyard! Weekend tourism was spreading rapidly.²

We cannot dispute the fact that in Arad the development of sports during that period was boosted and favored by the impetuous development of the economy and society in the city and the adjacent area. The emergence of strong enterprises, banks and credit cooperatives, manufactures, and services attracted thousands of inhabitants of the area to the urban environment, simultaneously with the strong development of pre-university education, school networks, material base and professional education. The facilities of many high schools in the city, regardless of nationality or profile, also reached the level of those in the western capitals in the field of sports and physical education.

A dynamic community leadership, most of whose representatives are graduates of the universities of Vienna, Berlin, Paris, London, Prague or Budapest, shows a special openness, at the transition from one century to another, for the sports and tourism movement, offering the newly established sports clubs, headquarters, land

and financial facilities for building their own sports bases. Arad and Timișoara thus become cities where sport becomes a concern of the population, of the young generation.

This openness to sports will also be inherited after the Great Union. Even if the socio-political transformations and the new realities of the time will leave their mark on the sports phenomenon, the inhabitants of the two cities will prove that they love sports.

The interwar Arad press, through the advertising of contests and actions of a sporting or touristic nature, through the publication of chronicles, impressions, interviews, through the participation of journalists in the life of sports societies, through the continuous promotion of the sporting act and message, proved to be up to the mark in this important cause.

We cannot deny the fact that, in a troubled period, sport found its place in the pages of Arad's publications, regardless of whether they had different political orientations or were independent. The presence of sports in these publications also proves the potential of the city's media to cover varied fields with professionalism and dedication. Let's not forget that the journalists of that time did not benefit from fax, internet or mobile phones, but they compensated for their lack with passion, respect for their profession and readers. An easy thing to prove by simply reading the publications of the time.

Arad is often related to tradition, to historical landmarks, some of which have become real symbols, which give individuality to the city, whether they are social, cultural, economic or sports. It is also nostalgic reporting, referring to times considered "better", the interwar period being a very good example.

We believe that it is more than necessary to bring back to the attention of young people these milestones, these symbols, in our case in the field of sports. We cannot erase a nail from the history of Arad, referring here only to football, names like Gloria or AMEFA. To which are added other different names, from various disciplines, which remain, in modern terms, "brands" of the community, which we are not allowed to forget. The interwar press, sports-themed albums, yearbooks or almanacs published during this period, from which we will quote in this work, help us with this.

The newspaper *Știrea*, for example, represented a source of information for those who studied the sports phenomenon in Arad, but the results were mostly found in books or articles that addressed specific topics: a certain sports branch (football, nautical sports, shooting), a club (AMEFA, Gloria) or a notable performance (championship titles, selections in the national team, Arad participation in sports events with national or international impact). Among those who used the newspaper *Știrea* as a source for reference works in the field, we can mention the late Tiberiu Țiganu, Radu Romanescu, Ionel Costin or Peter Puskel.

The *Știrea* newspaper also had a special envoy to the Berlin Olympics, the journalist Ioachim Dabiciu, whose impressions were published in a pamphlet, under the title "Impressions and findings from the Berlin Olympics. By car over six countries".³ An exciting read that not only provides information from the impressive sporting event, but is also an interesting travel report, in which the author captures

aspects of the social and economic life of the countries he passes through, his own opinions, related to what he sees and feels, being frankly expressed.

Ioachim (or Joachim) Dabiciu is briefly presented in the *Sports Album / Sport-Album*, published in Arad, in 1933:

DABICIU JOACHIM, teacher in Arad, president of the Tennis Federation District, b. in 1889. He was involved in sports already as a schoolboy. As a member of C.A.A. active as an athlete, distinguishing himself especially in running 100 and 200 m. flat, as well as in the game of ear ball. He won several championships, including the championship of the city of Arad. As a student he obtained 18 awards. He was the sports manager, committee member, and head of the football section of the Gloria C.F.R. Club. He is the president of the Arad Tennis Federation District and a founding member of the Tennis Federation. His book entitled «On Tennis and its General Rules» caused a great sensation in sports circles. As the president of the Tennis Federation, he strives, through many and large competitions, to make the Arad tennis sport one of the most developed.⁴

In *Cronica șahistă* ("The Chess Chronicle"), the sport of the mind will be allocated generous spaces in the sports section of the publication. Under the title "Master Halic won the Arad championship", the performance of one of the most talented Romanian chess players of the interwar period, Ioan Halic, is presented. He also appears under the name of Ivan Halic in specialist publications dedicated to sports with kings, queens and fools:

The long-awaited championship of our city ended with the brilliant victory of the young Romanian master Ioan Halic who ranked first out of 14 competitors...

The great meeting, "derby" as football players would classify it, between Halic and Daniel, was won by the former, in a very instructive final. The game lasted no less than 6 hours.

The new champion ranked with 12 points (out of 13 possible) without losing a game. After the resounding successes in Vienna, Paris - where he graduated from the Academy of Advanced International Studies - and Bucharest, Master Halic from the beginning was seen as a sure winner in the Arad championship.⁵

At the end of the same article we are informed that:

Arad will be represented at the national championships that will take place April 14-19 in Bucharest, by Mr. Ion Halic, St. Denes, Al. Weisz and Dr. Joseph Reichel.

The funds needed to send the players being almost secured, the registration for the championships was done.⁶

Of the four Arad chess players confirmed as certain participants in the national championships, only two, Ioan Halic and Stefan Denes, will be present in Bucharest. However, they will have exceptional behavior. Ioan Halic will become national champion, without losing a single game, and Stefan Denes will finish the competition in fourth place, both earning the right to represent Romania at the Munich Chess Olympiad:

In the last rounds of the national championship, Ioan Halic from Arad met the Yugoslav master Kostic. In the opening, Halic loses a pawn due to an easy game, but recovers and after extraordinary combinations ends the game with a draw. In the XIV round, Halic draws with Ungureanu and in the XV round - the last - although in a much superior position, he accepts the draw proposed by Denes, the second competitor from Arad...

The II prize and the title of champion of Romania in 1936 as well as the title of master of the Romanian Chess Federation and the silver cup of the newspaper *Universul* - went to Ioan Halic from Arad with 11 points. The new champion of Romania has a game rich in resources and in fantasies, he is an unsurpassed master of the finals and plays with amazing precision. He did not lose a single game in the whole competition. It is worth mentioning that since the war, Ioan Halic is the first ethnic Romanian chess champion of the country.⁷

Ioan Halic was born on September 18, 1910 in Arad, to Halic Gheorghe and Aurelia. His father was the head of the Arad office of the General Directorate of the CFR, a knight of the "Crown of Romania" Order. He attended elementary school and high school in Arad, then graduated from the Higher School of Commerce in 1929.

He learns chess in the first grades of primary school from his father, with whom, after only a few years, he "fights" on an equal footing. Noticing his son's unusual talent, Gheorghe Halic bought him some chess theory books from Budapest bookstores, after which little Ioan began to study chess. At the age of 14, he became a member of the "Association of Workers for Physical Education in Arad (AMEFA)", and before turning 16, in 1926, he became the chess champion of Arad, with 7 points out of 8 possible.

He went abroad to study, between 1930 and 1932 in Vienna, at the Consular Academy, then, between 1932 and 1934, in Paris, at the School of Advanced International Studies, graduating both successfully.

In 1931 he won the "Wiener Schachfreunden" circle championship in Vienna, then the correspondence tournament of the "Wiener Schachzeitung" magazine and a Viennese "Hauptturnier", which is why the Austrian federation awarded him the title of master before he was 22 years old.

Arriving in Paris, he gets in touch with the chess world here. The title of master obtained in Vienna allows him to participate, at the age of 23, in the "Championship of Paris", a tournament benefiting from the presence of 15 masters from several countries. He ranks second, only half a point behind the first-placed, Russian international master Nicolas Rosolimo. For this result the French Chess Federation awards him the diploma of "Maitre d'Echecs". Ioan Halic is invited to play in England as well, at the powerful international tournament in Hastings. Unfortunately, he is unable to honor the invitation as the competition takes place exactly at the same time as the final exams.

After returning to the country, he participates in the national championships. In 1935, he took fourth place, and in 1936 he became the champion of Romania, also obtaining the title of master from the Romanian Chess Federation.

In the same year, he participates with Romanian representatives at the Munich Chess Olympiad, having the best personal result in the team. He achieves a percentage of 65.8% (five wins and four draws), taking part in some anthological games. It should be noted that the Romanian team also included another native of Arad, Ștefan Deneș.

He settled in Bucharest, where, in 1939, he won the title of "Champion of the Bucharest Region".

In 1940, he married Edith Macskási, the daughter of a mathematics teacher from Arad. She will be with him until the last moments of his life, understanding his enormous passion for chess. By the way, the family she comes from was no stranger to chess, her younger brother, Előd, would be part of the Hungarian national chess team, and then the Canadian one, with remarkable results.

In 1941, Ioan Halic is concentrated and goes to the Soviet front, with the 1st Infantry Division. Due to his good knowledge of the German language, he serves as an interpreter at the division headquarters. He passes, together with his comrades, through Krivoi Rog, Dnipropetrovsk, arriving at Pavlovgrad. Due to frostbite on his feet, he is sent to the country, to the Military Hospital in Timișoara. He is demobilized and returns to Arad.

In 1943, an important event took place in the family, when his son Gheorghe was born. A graduate of the Faculty of Mathematics of "Babeș-Bolyai" University in Cluj-Napoca, he will become a respected university professor in Timișoara and Arad.

In January 1945, Ioan Halic is again concentrated, and this time he leaves for the Western front with the 93rd Infantry Regiment, with which he reaches close to Budapest, at Jászbéreny. Here the end of the war will find him.

After the conflagration, he returns to Arad, where he works as a clerk at the "Astra" Wagon Factory, continuing his chess activity.

In 1948, at the "Mach Romania - Bulgaria" contest, held in Bucharest, he ranked II-III, for which he was awarded the title of Chess Master of the R.P.R. The result was also confirmed in 1955, when it ranked IV-VI in the Romanian Championship, only half a point behind the first three. He will evolve, with notable results, in the Romanian national team, from 1939 to 1959.

He became a coach since 1949, training the national junior and senior teams, as well as the women's team. He raised chess players who reached the top: Victor

Ciocâltea, Theodor Ghițescu, Carol Partoș, Florin Gheorghiu, respectively Maria Pogorevici, Margareta Teodorescu, Elisabeta Polihroniade.

At the World Team Chess Championships, from 1957, held in Emmen (Holland), the Romanian women's team, coached and led by Ioan Halic, ranked 1st-2nd, tied on points with the powerful team of the Soviet Union.

In Arad, since 1950, he has been coaching the chess team of the "Rapid" club. He continues his coaching activity here, after 1962 participating as a sportsman only in team competitions.

At the age of 61, he became a grandfather with the birth of his granddaughter Edith-Alice. He will strengthen this status with the birth of his grandson, Eduard.

Unfortunately, at the age of 66 he fell ill, starting a treatment in Budapest, for this reason settling in the capital of Hungary. The Hungarian Federation recognizes his maestro title. Despite his fragile health, he participates in team competitions, also working as a coach at a club in Budapest.

His health gradually worsened and he passed away on July 8, 1978 at the age of 68. Arad loses one of its great sports personalities and at the same time a moral and professional landmark.

Ioan Halic will be mentioned in 1981 in the *Romanian Chess Magazine*, in an article signed by engineer C. Ștefaniu, which opens with a quote from the same magazine, from 1936: "He has a scientific, solid positional game and a safety that will bring him a lot of victories".⁸

Moving from the "sport of kings and knights" to the "king sport", let's note that the football derby of Arad, between Gloria and Amefa (AMEFA), will generate great passions in the interwar period, also reflected in the newspaper pages. In this chapter, *Știrea* is far from equidistant, clearly supporting Gloria, a team always presented in the newspaper's pages as belonging to the "Romanians", as opposed to Amefa, grouping of the "Jewish-Hungarian minority". An attitude that can be perceived in tune with the trend of the time, of rallying for a more accentuated "Romanianization" of the entire activity in the territories that united with the Kingdom of Romania in 1918. Including the sports one. This attitude also seems a bit bizarre considering that both teams included Romanian, Hungarian, German or Jewish footballers. Just as it happened with the other teams from Transylvania and Banat, regardless of the football echelon in which they were active. Returning to the match itself, played in the spring of 1936, let's say that it will benefit from a generous advance notice, addressed to the "sportsmen" from Arad, who were looking forward to the meeting. With the mention that in that period the term "sportsman", often found in the sports columns of publications, also meant "sport lover", passionate, consumer of the sports phenomenon.

Any journalism textbook claims that the title of an article can decisively point to its quality, so Gloria - Amefa is presented as "The biggest match of the season [...]". Given that both teams were claiming the title of champion, the subtitle of the article suggests this by announcing that "Gloria and Amefa are fighting for the supremacy of Arad and ... Romanian football.":

(...) we are on the day of the consummation of the most attractive and important match of the National Division: Gloria-AMEFA

(...) The comments, criticisms and versions that circulate among the athletes from Arad about this derby, make even the non-athletes to palpitate and be present at this match.

Today's game, as always, has the gift of qualifying the strongest Arad team. The winner will be the champion of Arad.

This time, however, the game presents yet another incomparably large fact. Gloria and Amefa fight not only for the conquest of the Arad championship, but also for Romania's. The winner has a good chance to qualify for this top spot. The players of Gloria have infiltrated the importance of the game and of course they will make every effort to reward the work done by the managers, in favor of promoting Romanian sport.⁹

An additional proof of the "pro-glorist" orientation of the newspaper is the end of the article with the subtitle "A few words to the glorists":

You glorious player must give all the efforts you have in this match. Let the most beautiful glorious Romanian feelings vibrate in you, let the love of your club not leave your mind for even a second, and then we assure you that today after the match you will be frantically applauded by the crowd of Romanians in the arena. Don't think for a moment that there is some kind of opponent in front of you.

Dear glorists, in front of you is your most dangerous enemy: it is the AMEFA team!

If you will take this match seriously, you will surely be victorious...¹⁰

After the match, under the title "A well-deserved defeat of Gloria", the chronicle of the long-awaited meeting turns into a model of what a "media lynching" means today and meant then. Practically, in the name of "Romanianism", the management of the Gloria club is summoned to give up the minority players, accused of not having properly defended their chances in front of those from Amefa, a team called again "Jewish-Hungarian". A real conspiracy is suggested that led to the unfavorable results obtained in the championship and the Romanian Cup, the article turning towards what today we can call a "tabloid". With the accusations, exposures and insinuations of rigor:

(...) Yes, time is too precious to allow the continuation of what is happening in Gloria's bosom, and not do our duty by divulging everything to public opinion...

Following this sad failure, the culprits no longer deserve to be cared for, - because a large part of the Romanian population, and especially intellectuals, are grouped around Gloria, for whom they sacrificed a lot. And the mockery of the Jewish-Hungarian minority, which is

thrown by the words spoken on Thursday after the match: "It's good that we closed the mouths of the Wallachians for once", makes us face the cards.

A vehement campaign has started in the country for the Romanianization of our football as well as all other branches of sport...

The minorities found by this current in Gloria's activity, had nothing to do and watched as one by one from their group left the team. But they decided to take revenge. And they took revenge just the other day in the match with Amefa...

Variassy didn't show anything that could be called football. Besides, during the winter he dealt with Amefa... Dobra, prima donna, weak. He doesn't deserve half of what Gloria did for his princely existence. By the way, he is also among the old "sympathizers" of Amefa...

Mercea - the "dog" as he is also called, - couldn't even play if he drank on Wednesday night until 3 in the morning, as he himself boasted.¹¹

The inter-war period offers famous personalities in Arad sports, whether we are talking about players, coaches, referees or leaders. Along with which we will find landmarks of the public administration (Ștefan Anghel - mayor of Arad), the economic environment (Ladislau Holzer - merchant), banking (Eugen Grob Jarembinai - bank manager), medical (Nicolae Bonciocat - doctor), cultural (Lazăr Nichi - director of the Cultural Palace) or even religious (Grigorie Comșa - bishop of Arad). They, along with many others, will practice the sport, and later they will be actively involved in supporting it, in various forms.

However, the main attention of the public will be given to those "from the grass", the football stars, an emblematic example being Ștefan Barbu. To add charm to its presentation, I have kept the quote found in a publication of the time:

BARBU ȘTEFAN II., civil servant in Arad, b. in 1908. Already as a school child he started to deal with sports, cultivating all branches of sports, and later, he settled on football and is one of the most famous players in the Arad football field. Since 1925 he has been a permanent member of the Arad national team, and 8 times the Romanian national team. To date, he has taken part in 506 football matches, obtaining 17 awards. In 1930, he was part of the Romanian national team, which took part in the World Olympiad, held in Monte-Video, where he played against the national teams of Peru and Uruguay. He is currently a member of the Gloria C.F.R. Club team.¹²

The football matches between Arad and Timișoara, with Gloria, AMEFA, Ripensia and Chinezul, were of particular interest in the pages of the "Știrea" newspaper.

"A game with adventures" is the title of the dispute between Chinezul and Gloria, the match taking place in Timișoara, on the "muddy arena of "Banat":

(...) The wonderful actions that were taken, the art with which the points were scored, the emotions that the vigorous incursions gave us, and the repeated shots on goal, exceeded all expectations, satisfying even the most subtle demands of the scrupulous people...

Gloria – Chinezul 2:2 (0:0)

The wonderful actions taken by Gloria draw applause from the Arad supporters... come to counteract the animosity of the Timișoara people and their impulsiveness pushed to the extreme...

From this moment the game unfolds in the midst of an indescribable tumult. The gloristic supporters, outraged by the unqualified behavior of the chinezists, address them "loudly" with a number of invectives, for the return to order.¹³

In the field of sports media history, yearbooks, guides and almanacs published in the interwar period represent an important source of information. They base their content mainly on what the press has provided, thus readers have the chance to receive a concentrated form of the top sporting events, the results obtained in the competitions. All offering a welcome overview of the phenomenon, through an attractive read.

A remarkable editorial appearance of this kind, trilingual (Romanian/Hungarian/German), is represented by *Albumul Sportiv/Sport-Album 1932-1933*, appeared in 1932, in November, in Arad, found, fortunately, in the collections of both county libraries, "Alexandru D. Xenopol" from Arad and "Sorin Titel" from Timișoara.

In the more than 500 pages, along with presentations of various sports, we find numerous information and photos related to personalities and clubs from the Banat and Transylvania areas, the album practically constituting a real encyclopedia.

The preface of the work, signed by Dr. Rudolf Remény, brings to attention several problems of Romanian sport. Sadly, we have to admit that after almost a century, they are painfully relevant:

Today, when we live in the age of sport, it also has another, much more important purpose. We see that nations sacrifice millions upon millions for sports, reaching the conclusion that great nations are recognized through sports, and today not even the diplomat can make his nation a bigger propaganda than the sportsman.

At the Olympics in Los Angeles, where we were unfortunately absent, the nations made a colossal effort of strength, to reach a success as beautiful as possible, to document their nation's right to exist, before foreignness.

Along with education, the album also comes with a well-documented popularization of the main sports that were practiced in that period in the world. History, performers, new elements from the respective disciplines, and, an element worth mentioning, numerous photos, of good quality, accompanied by explanations. The level reached by Romania in each sports branch is also mentioned, with recommendations addressed to the governing forums of Romanian sports for support and involvement.

They are reviewed, respecting the titles in the album: "athletics, football, Greco-Roman wrestling, free wrestling (catch-as-catch-can), tennis, ping-pong, fencing, weaponry fencing, motoring and motorcycling, field hockey, cycling, water sports (swimming), skating, gymnastics". It should be noted that for "football" a photo of the groups in vogue at that time was not chosen, but one of "the Romanian football teams "Petru Maior" from Budapest".

As a conclusion, let us say that, beyond rivalries and fierce competition, sports led to socialization, to the closeness of people, regardless of the clubs or associations they belonged to, sympathized with or supported. Simple people but also numerous personalities of interwar Arad practiced sport, loved it and, as far as possible, supported its deployment, promotion and development. They were an example for the society as involvement and passion.

And more than a hundred years ago, sports gave birth to friendship, camaraderie and even love. It remains something that must not be forgotten. The history, the legend, the beautiful and always full of nostalgia story of Arad sports.

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