

ORADEA'S TEAMS IN THE ROMANIAN FIRST DIVISION OF WATER POLO

ȘTEFAN MAROTI^{1,*}, PETRU FLORIN PEȚAN¹ & MIHAELA GOINA²

ABSTRACT. There are few works that have reported on the history of this sport in Oradea. On the basis of this reality, the authors considered that a work concerning the participation of Oradea's teams in the Romanian first division of water polo would be interesting and useful for fans of this segment of Oradea's sport history. Studying the past of water polo in Oradea and publishing the results of such research is necessary because there is valuable information in archives, libraries, sports newspapers, sports columns of newspapers, personal albums, and different writings of participants in various events linked to the history of Oradea's water polo. There are many valuable pieces of information waiting to be investigated and made available to those interested. This study investigates the most important athletes and events of the best teams from our city during the 65 years of participation in the National Championship. This study describes the players, coaches and results obtained by Oradea's teams in the Romanian first division of water polo. This work takes advantage of the vast documents available and represents a monograph of Oradea's water polo history.

Key words: sport's history, water polo, National Championship, Oradea

REZUMAT. *Echipe orădene în prima divizie de polo a României.* Cu toate că dintre jocurile sportive de echipă practicate în orașul nostru poloul are cele mai bune rezultate, în literatura de specialitate se găsesc puține lucrări care să abordeze trecutul acestei discipline sportive în Oradea. Pornind de la această realitate, autorii au crezut de cuviință că o lucrare privind participarea echipelor orădene în prima divizie de polo a României este de actualitate și este utilă pentru cei interesați de acest segment al istoriei sportului orădean. Studiarea trecutului acestui sport în Oradea, publicarea rezultatelor unor asemenea cercetări este cu atât mai necesară cu cât în arhive, în biblioteci, în pagini ale ziarelor de sport, în rubricile sportive ale unor cotidiane, în albume personale, în diferite însemnări ale participanților la diferite evenimente legate

¹ University of Oradea, Geography, Tourism and Sport Faculty, Physical Education, Sport and Physical Therapy Department

² University of Oradea, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Educational Sciences

* Corresponding author: marotistefan@yhoo.com

de istoria polului orădean există informații valoroase, care așteaptă să fie cercetate și puse la dispoziția celor interesați. Lucrarea se referă la principalele momente prin care au trecut cele mai bune echipe de polo din orașul nostru în cei șaiszeci și cinci de ani de participare în campionatul național, la jucătorii, antrenorii și la rezultatele obținute de grupările orădene în prima divizie de polo a României. Lucrarea reprezintă valorificarea, și sub această formă, a documentelor studiate în vederea redactării unei monografii a poloului orădean.

Cuvinte cheie: istoria sportului, polo, campionat național, Oradea

The first years of participation in the National Championship

In the mid 1940s in our city there were some old traditions linked to the practicing of water polo (Nagyvárad, 1912; Fehér and Hönig 1937), Oradea's water polo teams had good results in competitions during the interwar period (Nagyvárad, 1926 a; Nagyvárad, 1928; Török, 1937) and in the Transylvanian Championship during the years of the Second World War, (Nagyvárad, 1943/1999); it also had successful international connections (Nagyvárad, 1926; Nagyvárad Sportya, 1931); water polo was a prominent contributor to the Development Program of Oradea's sport, developed by the Popular Sport Organization. Despite this rich history water polo has not been considered among the primary sport disciplines in Oradea (Pásztai et al., 2011). The lack of interest from the sports local management and insufficient support from local authorities made it impossible to prepare a team to participate in the first National Championship in the summer of 1946.

Due to the enthusiasm and willingness of some young people and the support received from the management of Libertatea Fur Factory, in the summer of 1947, a water polo team from Oradea entered as one of the participants to the Swimming and Water Polo National Championship (Crisana, 1947). Even though the water polo team's activities had been observed with great interest by many inhabitants of the city and the players had a strong fan base, Oradea's water polo had to deal with shortages and other difficulties that had only been partially resolved.

From 1946 to 1957, the fact that this sport was insufficiently supported by the local authorities and the economic environment of the city resulted in Oradea being represented in only in seven editions of the best water polo teams' championship, the team missed the 1949, 1950 and 1953 editions. The uncertainty in the local water polo during this time caused the team which represented Oradea in the first division to have more than one name –

Libertatea, in 1947, Întreprinderea Comunală, in 1948, Constructorul, during 1951 - 1955, Energia, during 1956 - 1957 - depending on the economic organization which financed its activity. In these circumstances, the results were not very good, 3rd place in 1947, 5th place in 1948, four 6th places in 1951, 1955, 1956 and 1957, 8th place in 1952, and 9th place in 1954 (Vasiliu, 1998). The results of Oradea's water polo teams during that time were influenced by the fact that a series of valuable players were transferred, either to Dinamo Bucharest or to the Army's Central House Bucharest. In these circumstances, Oradea's teams weren't able to obtain outstanding results (Demjén, 1996). The unfortunate events in Oradea's water polo during that time culminated in 1957, when Energia was relegated to the second division (Sportul popular, 1957).

The problems faced by the water polo teams in that period have demonstrated that without appropriate financial support, the benevolence of some supporters of this sport, the players' enthusiasm, the desire to achieve performance cannot lead to the achievement of a solid foundation for this sport or to achieve high performance.

A decade of success among the best Water Polo teams in Romania

In the summer of 1957, sports in our country were transformed with the creation of the Physical Culture and Sports Union (Kiriteşcu, 1964). This generated changes at the sports movement in Oradea. These changes had a great effect on the polo division. Forming the Sports Club of Oradea, a higher achieving sports unit, that made water polo a priority sport set an organizational framework that allowed water polo to develop in the territory (Proces verbal, 1957). In addition to these events a similar series of actions were undertaken by the water polo group. The pennant team of the local water polo club was transferred to the Sports Club of Oradea. From the first year the team was strengthened, either by bringing in valuable players from other teams such as Mureşan Alexandru, Oanţă Adrian, Antonescu, Biró Tiberiu, Novák Iosif, Rujinschi Nicolae, Culineac Iosif, Alexandrescu Ioan, or by promoting young players from the junior team such as Muth Aurel, Lengyel Adalbert and others. The team's coach was Freud Emerich, a technician with extensive experience, a valuable coach who, in 1957, had led Dinamo Bucharest to winning the first national championship. As shown by the results of his years as the head coach, he proved to be the right person to lead Oradea's water polo future.

Under the leadership of the new coach, the water polo group started to improve decisively on the road to national prominence and began a tradition of high level performance. Through the changes made in the team's composition, the efforts in changing the players' mentality and the way in which the new coach

ruled and carried out the training processes and participation in competitions, the player began to consistently increase the level of performance. In the next few years, Oradea's players became more valuable, and the team became successful which placed the team among the best water polo teams of that time. In 1967, Crișul Oradea completed a decade in which it was successful at the national level. The consistent high level of performance developed a fan base who supported water polo. All of these efforts resulted in the rebound of the Oradea team into the first division. The team achieved two 2nd places, three bronze medals and three 4th places in division A. (Dezvoltarea, 1964; Dare seamă, 1969).

A tough period for Oradea's water polo

After this series of positive results personnel at the club's management level and some players became complacent and issues that developed were not addressed appropriately. As a result of this attitude and management flaws, in the late 1960s the team had old players, many of whom lacked the necessary motivation and physical capacity to meet the requirements set for high-level performance (Documentele, 1973).

As the situation worsened the club's management realized that radical actions would be needed to rectify the situation. So, a massive rejuvenating campaign of the team was carried out. As a result of these actions, only some older players remained, Biró, Muth, Hegyessy. Some players who made history in Oradea's water polo left Ilea, Filip, Csordás. New players came: Lengyel, Kovács, Pécsi, Chirilă, Harabula, Bartovici, Pápai, Stănescu, Zacoianis, Moruzi, Rácz, Tomescu and Freud, who tried to bring the team back to its former level of play. Unfortunately, very few of the new players managed to match the successes of their predecessors. These results caused the team to lose much of its value, as the team's record deteriorated, ending with a 6th place in 1968, 9th place in 1969, 8th place in 1970 and 1971. In 1972, the low value of many players, the young age of others, and the lack of competitive experience of the players at this level forced the coach to realize that the reconstruction efforts of the team had led to a weak record and a move to Division B of the championship (Buletin informativ, 1972).

In 1973, the team was forced to participate in the second division of the championship and this came as a shock. The team also entered a lower group IX – XII. All of these culminated with the absence of Coach Freud Emerich and of one of the most valuable players, Freud Roland, who emigrated in the Federal Republic of Germany. During these difficult moments, the new coach, Rujinschi Nicolae, and his players believed in the chance they had; they put passion in

their work; they found the resources and the strength to overcome the difficulties, even if they had to pass through three tough years in the second division. With all the problems and inconveniences of those three years in which Crișul Oradea played in the second division, some good things happened. The perspective regarding the water polo's organization was rethought from the scratches; the basis of a new Centre for children and juniors was laid. The Center proved to be one of the best in the country. The management gave up the idea of bringing a large number of ready formed players and they encouraged the development of players from Oradea (Conferința, 1977).

The progress achieved by most of the players and the reentrance of the team into the A series of the championship in 1975 was a sign that Oradea's water polo team was on the right track. The team had valuable human resources, and, in a short time, Crișul Oradea would return among the strongest groups of water polo in Romania. The team obtained the following results: two 5th places in 1976 and 1977, and 6th place in 1978 in the first division (Participarea, 2011). This demonstrated that the organizational measures taken were working and that the human resources policy on selecting, promoting and training juniors proved viable. The process of preparation and participation in competitions was aligned with the requirements of the first division. The results of these years represented the beginning of a spectacular ascension which, in less than a decade, would bring Oradea's team on the top hierarchy of water polo in Romania.

A new period of glory

At the end of the 1970s there had been several changes which led to an important change in the history of Oradea's water polo. The effects of Coach Rujinschi Nicolae's strategy and activity started to be felt. The coach trained and promoted valuable juniors that might be able to form the core of a competitive team. In order to strengthen the team, players such as Miron Cozma, Garofeanu Liviu, Ungureanu Vasile and Rusu Claudiu were brought in. These decisions made the team considerably more competitive. Another important ingredient in the success of team was its contract of collaboration with Progresul (Proces verbal, 1978) which resulted with combined forces joining in the structure's leadership representatives of some economic units, Hârcă Florian and Cosma Horia, which had the resources to support financially and materially the process of selecting, training and promoting players, to ensure the conditions for participation in national competitions and European clubs' cups (Proces verbal, 1979).

Combining these favorable factors with the appropriate financial backing and the professionalism of coaches Rujinschi Nicolae and Alexandrescu Ioan, who were now working with talented players, the team succeeded in those years to obtain the best results in its entire history. In 1979 and 1980, Crișul Oradea ranked fourth. In 1981, Oradea's team won bronze medals in the internal competition (Anuar, 1982), combined with a brilliant success at international level: 2nd place in Cup Winners' Cup (Poloul românesc, 2010).

In 1985, Crișul team's players – Rada Mihai, Csáki István, Kiss Francisc, Gordan Cornel, Costrăș Dorin, Garofeanu Liviu, Fejér Iván, Pantea Roberto, Illés Zoltán, Indig Gabor, Indig László, Boné Ladislau, were ranked first in the Republican Championship A Division, placing Oradea among the cities whose teams had won the title of national champions at water polo. (Raețchi, 1985). This performance was also repeated at the next edition of the championship (Anuar, 1987). These successes confirmed the value of Oradea's school of water polo and placed a generation of players in the fans' hearts and in the statistics as reference points in the history of sports of Oradea.

Years of transition and formation of a new competitive team

Winning two championship titles, along with the joy of victory and celebrating success generated hopes, plans and ambitions. Launching on the road to great performances, every supporter of the team hoped that they would find resources so that the beautiful adventure of Oradea's water polo would continue at the highest level. But, in the next few years, the exchange of generations and shift of Alexandrescu Ioan into an administrative function made the team lack the necessary resources to return to its highest level of performance. Under these circumstances, Garofeanu Liviu, the newest coach of the team, launched a project that had as main objectives the efficient management of the restructuring and creation of a new competitive team (Dezvoltarea activității, 1988).

Even if the team was undergoing a tough period, with many and various problems, the coach's professionalism combined with the players' ambition and diligence led to good results. Between 1987 and 1990, Crișul Oradea, with two 2nd places and two bronze medals, was the best placed team of the province. Because the team was managed with competence and tactfulness the problems generated by the changes occurred in the sports movement after 1989, a generation of new players and the loss of players who left to play abroad did not negatively affect the team's results. Crișul succeeded to rank among the first four teams of the championship between 1990 – 1995 (Participarea, 2011).

After issues with team players, repeated changes of coaches and team's results led Alexandrescu Ioan, the president of the Crișul Club, to make some decisions regarding the strategy of reestablishing the prominence of water polo

in Oradea. The appointment of Gordan Cornel as the head coach of the A Division team led to a reorganization of the team. Once again players from junior teams from Oradea, Crişul and Dinamo were promoted to play along with old team players: Rada Mihai, Andrasoni Nicolae and Cîmpianu Ciprian (Proces verbal, 1996). Even though the players started with enthusiasm and worked hard, their youth and lack of experience at this competition level resulted in 6th place and 4th place finish in the championship (Participarea, 2011).

As a result in 2004, the A Division team was transferred from Crişul to the Municipal Sports Club, a sports unit of performance financed by Oradea Town Hall. This move contributed to the improvement of conditions of training and participation in competitions. As a result, in 2006, after seven seasons in a row in which the team was ranked third (Anuar, 2007) the team won the silver medal which allowed the team to reach a new psychological threshold which effects were soon to be seen.

Successes in a row

Starting with 2006, the advantages of transferring the team to the Municipal Sports Club began to show with better financing and improved conditions of training which led to better results for the team. Exceeding that psychological threshold by ranking in second place in the National Super League had a positive effect not only on the players and coach, but also among the team's supporters. The business environment became more interested in sponsorship agreements with the best image from Oradea's sports.

With the team's increase in value, support from Leonardo Company, better conditions of training, and financial incentives for players, the coach and water polo section's management considered that they had set the conditions for a real chance for earning the title of national champion. At the end of the 2006/2007 edition of the National Super League, as a result of its development in the 36 stages, Oradea's team conquered, after 21 years, the third title of national champion. The successes continued, rewarding the Town Hall, Oradea's Local Council, sponsors, the thousands of supporters with six other 1st place finishes in the Water Polo National Super League (Anuarintern, 2014). With these great results, the water polo team of the Municipal Sports Club Oradea brought glory and pride to the club, the city, the fans and all of those who supported the team.

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