

CONTRIBUTIONS TO IDENTIFYING THE BEGINNINGS OF PRACTICING TABLE TENNIS IN ORADEA

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ABSTRACT. In the beginning table tennis spread year after year due to people recorded by history, but above all due to numerous practitioners who have remained unknown. Owing to Edward Shires, in the early years of the 20th century table tennis reached the Far East being practised in Hong Kong, China, Japan and Korea (4). In the last years of the 19th century the game had spread in Central European countries. The following years saw a period of great development in the Austrian - Hungarian Empire when it also reached towns in Transylvania, Banat and Crisana. The early history of table tennis in our country closely mirrored that of many other sports. Young Romanian, Hungarian, Saxon, Jewish people who were studying in great university cities like Vienna, Budapest, Berlin, Prague and others started practising table tennis and taking part in competitions (Pásztai s. a., 2011). When they came back, in their luggage, together with the university degree they had bats and celluloid balls. There is evidence and oral tradition has it that in the years before the First World War table tennis was introduced in places from Transylvania, Banat and Crisana by young people who had studied abroad, but it was not very popular (Fehér and Hönig, 1937).

Key words: *history of sport, table tennis, Oradea*

REZUMAT. *Contribuții privind cunoașterea începutului practicării tenisului de masă la Oradea.* În anii săi de pionierat, tenisul de masă s-a răspândit, an de an, datorită unor persoane pe care istoria i-a consemnat, dar mai ales cu sprijinul numeroșilor practicanți ai săi rămași anonimi. Datorită lui Edward Shires, încă din primii ani ai secolului XX, tenisul de masă a ajuns în Extremul Orient, fiind practicat în Hong Kong, China, Japonia și Coreea. (4) În ultimii ani ai secolului XIX, această disciplină sportivă a ajuns în țările Europei Centrale. În anii care au urmat, tenisul de masă a cunoscut o perioadă de avânt în Austro-Ungaria. În această perioadă, prin intermediul unor tineri studenți, tenisul de masă a ajuns în localități din Transilvania, Banat și Crișana. Povestea de început a tenisului de

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masă la noi în țară a fost aproape la fel cu a multor alte sporturi. Tineri români, maghiari, sași, evrei din ținuturile românești aflați la studii în marile centre universitare precum Viena, Budapesta, Berlin, Praga și altele au început să practice tenisul de masă și au participat la diferite competiții. (Pásztai s. a., 2011) La întoarcere, în bagajul lor, alături de diplomele universitare, au adus în țară palete și mingi de celoid. Există indicii și s-a transmis prin viu grai, din generație în generație, că în anii de dinaintea Primului Război Mondial, în localități din Transilvania, Banat și Crișana tenisul de masă era cunoscut prin intermediul unor tineri întorși de la studii, fără ca acest sport să aibă un număr prea mare de practicanți. (Fehér și Hönig, 1937)

Cuvinte cheie: istoria sportului, tenis de masă, Oradea

INTRODUCTION

Table tennis comes to Transylvania

Like many other sports table tennis has its origins in the United Kingdom of Great Britain. It was first mentioned in a document in 1884 (3). Its original name was inspired by the fact that when the celluloid ball hit the bat and then the table it produced a specific sound called by Steve Grant ping-pong. Even if it had a lot of fans, table tennis remained for a period of twenty years a simple entertainment game.

In its early years table tennis spread year after year due to people recorded by history, but above all due to numerous practitioners who have remained unknown. Owing to Edward Shires, in the early years of the 20th century table tennis reached the Far East being practised in Hong Kong, China, Japan and Korea (4). In the last years of the 19th century the game had spread in Central European countries. The following years saw a period of great development in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire when it also reached towns in Transylvania, Banat and Crisana.

The beginnings of table tennis in Oradea

The beginnings of table tennis in our country closely mirrored that of many other sports. Young Romanian, Hungarian, Saxon, Jewish people who were studying in great university cities like Vienna, Budapest, Berlin, Prague and others started practising table tennis and taking part in competitions (Pásztai s. a., 2011). When they came back, in their luggage, together with the university degree they

had bats and celluloid balls. There is evidence and oral tradition has it that in the years before the First World War table tennis was introduced in places from Transylvania, Banat and Crisana by young people who had studied abroad, but it was not very popular (Fehér and Hónig, 1937).

At the beginning of the 20th century Oradea was known as a city of sports, so table tennis found fertile land to develop. Oradea was among the first cities in our country where table tennis was played and where local competitions were organised. The best players took part in the Transylvania Championship (Demjén, 1996). During the First World War, like other sports practised in Oradea, table tennis stopped being played.

Expanding practice and organising the first table tennis competitions

In the period following the 1st December 1918 Union, in spite of many hardships, the new authorities made great efforts to reintroduce sports among the leisure activities of the people from Oradea, especially the young people. Among the sports branches loved by the young people of Oradea of those times was table tennis.

The early 1920s represented a period of time in which table tennis was spreading in many countries year after year and, as a result, many national and international competitions were being organised. Oradea table tennis followed suit. Although there were no clubs affiliated to the Romanian Sport Societies Federation, some sport institutions offered initiation and training in table tennis to young people. Among the Oradea sport institutions that played a great role in promoting table tennis in the beginning Maccabi, Clubul Athletic (The Athletic Club) and Stăruința (Persistence) deserve special mention (Török, 1937). Table tennis was also promoted at the initiative of the newspaper Sporhirlap, which published a series of articles with the presentation and rules of the game. (Sporhirlap, January, 7th 1923). On the 11th and 12th of March 1923 in the Metropol Restaurant Club in Oradea the first table tennis competition was organised after the First World War at the initiative of the following gentlemen: Weisz, Wesel, Partos, Ziszovits and Békéssy.

The necessity of local organisation was felt as a result of the fact that more and more young people were attracted to the sport and they took part in competitions. Consequently, in 1926 table tennis clubs were constituted at Clubul Athletic (The Athletic Club) (Nagyvárad, January, 3rd 1931) and Asociația Sportivă Stăruința (Persistence Sport Association) (Török, 1937). They were followed by the clubs constituted at Maccabi, in 1927 (Nagyvárad, March, 2nd 1927) and Înțelegerea (Understanding), in 1928 (Nagyvárad, September, 24th 1928). Following the initiative of Adorján Péter the Subcommission of Ping-Pong was

constituted at the Oradea Regional Committee of the Romanian Sport Societies Federation. The first competition organised by the Ping-Pong Subcommission was the local championship (Sporthirlap, Septembrer, 28th 1926).

After the establishment of this local ruling body Oradea table tennis knew a period of bloom. The number and level of the local championships increased considerably. The most important local competitions were: CAO Cup, (Nagyvárad, March, 29th 1927), Maccabi Cup, (Nagyvárad, June, 8th 1928) Înțelegerea (Understanding) Cup (Nagyvárad, September, 24th 1928). Also the number of table tennis halls grew. Among them the halls at the Metropol Restaurant, (Sporthirlap, March, 19th 1923), Palace Restaurant, (Nagyvárad, April, 28th 1928) Ullmann Palace, (Sporthirlap, October, 15th 1928) Oltea Doamna Girls School, (Nagyvárad, December, 28th 1930), Staruinta (Persistence) Sport Association hall (Nagyvárad, March, 7th 1928).

Among the sport leaders who had an active role in the table tennis clubs and contributed to the organisation of the competitions held in Oradea in that period special mention deserve: Adorján Péter, president of the Oradea Ping-Pong Subcommission, Bátori Dániel, president of the Staruinta (Persistence) Sport Association, Vargha Ferenc, president of the Intelegerea (Understanding) Sport Association, Glükmann Arthur and Goldstein Adolf members of the table tennis club of Maccabi Sport Association. At the same time, Fülöp Ernő, Fogel István, Schlesinger József and Bábí Zeno, members of the Oradea Regional Ping-Pong Subcommission played a great role in developing this sport in our city. (Sporthirlap, October, 22nd 1928)

The following male players deserve to be mentioned for their contribution to implementing and developing table tennis in its first years in Oradea: Beck Gyula, Fogel István, Adorján Péter, Salamon Imre, Goldstein István, Steiner András, Täglicht József and Nussbaum Imre. As for the female players the following had the best results: Papos Irma, Molnár Anna, Liszka Manci and Örömi Pipi.

Table tennis players from Oradea in national and international competitions

The setting up of the Oradea table tennis Subcommission had a positive impact on the activity of the clubs. The late 1920s and early 1930s saw not only a quantitative improvement in Oradea table tennis – increase in the number of practitioners, number of teams and broadening of the sport calendar, but also a qualitative one – better playing level, better competition organisation and better results.

As a result of the development of the clubs and the training of valuable players who obtained good results in local competitions, Oradea tennis playing representatives started to take part in regional competitions beginning with the year 1928 (Sportvilág, October, 22nd 1928). Between 1928 and 1939 Oradea table tennis players dominated the national competitions in which they took part: 28 – 29 January 1928, in Oradea, (Nagyvárad, January, 31st 1928) 24 – 25 March 1928, in Cluj, (Nagyvárad, March, 27th 1928), 15 – 16 November 1929, in Timișoara (Sportvilág, November, 18th 1929), 26 – 27 December 1930, in Oradea (Nagyvárad, December, 28th 1930).

Oradea athletes also won the first editions of table tennis national competitions. Steiner András won the single male competitions in 1929, 1930, 1931 and 1932. The Oradea pair Steiner András – Goldstein István won male doubles in three editions of national finals in 1930, 1932 and 1933. Liszka Mancsi and Steiner András won the mixed doubles in the first edition of the national championship and Papos Irma și Steiner András won the first place in the final of 1932. Papos Irma was the individual female winner of the national championship of 1932 (1).

International participation

Although Romania had limited sport relationships with other countries at the beginning of the 1920s and the international calendar included few events, due to personal contacts of Oradea sports managers with trainers and sport managers from abroad, as well as due to great efforts of table tennis lovers Oradea's best tennis players took part in a series of international friendly competitions organised in the country and in Hungary. Oradea athletes could also take part in official competitions organised by the International Table Tennis Federation. The competitive experience of players such as Goldstein István and Spitz Arthur was improved as a result of their participation in the international contest organised in Timișoara, where they played against athletes from Hungary, among whom the world champion Mednyánszky Mária. (Nagyvárad, March, 25th 1928). Before the world championship from 1929 Steiner Arthur and Goldstein István took part in the international competition held between 22 and 25 November 1929 by Magyar Torna Klub Budapest (Sportvilág, November, 18th 1929)

The most prestigious competitions in which Oradea table tennis players took part at the beginning of this sport in Romania were the 1929 and 1931 editions of the world championships (Antal, 1974). The Romanian team formed of Steiner, Guttmann, Goldstein, Spitz and Täglicht came in the places VII-VIII out of ten participants in the team event in Budapest in 1929. The presence of the Romanian team at the 1931 edition was made possible by Adorján Péter, who

organised and financed it. The team was formed of Steiner from Oradea and Ponta and Guttmann from Arad. They played well finishing on the 8th place before Yugoslavia, Lithuania and Indonesia (Paneth, 2003).

Among the achievements of the Oradea table tennis one can mention the fact that the Romanian team who took part in the Jewish Olympiad from Prague in 1929 was formed of the players from the Oradea Maccabi Sport Association, led by Steiner Endre (Schon s. a., 1981).

Contributions to the coordination of the national activity and personalities who had an impact on the development of table tennis in the country

In the beginning the best table tennis clubs were in Arad, Cluj, Oradea and Timisoara. Consequently, it was these cities that played an important role in the coordination of the activity in that period. In 1928, as a result of the activity analysis in the national ruling body it was decided by the general meeting to move its headquarters from Bucharest to a town in Transylvania. Shortly afterwards the Romanian Sports Societies Federation announced the leaders of the Oradea department to take the necessary measures to move the table tennis national ruling body to Oradea (Nagyvárad, June, 8th 1928).

The Romanian Ping-Pong Federation was established on October, 1st 1931 in Oradea. This body led the activity in this sport until 1933 when a new body was elected with the headquarters in Bucharest. (2)

Adorján Péter, the president of Staruinta (Persistence) Sport Association from Oradea, and head of the table tennis Subcomission in the Romanian Sports Societies Federation had a very important role in promoting this sport locally and nationally. He took an active part in the foundation of the Romanian Ping-Pong Federation and supported many activities of the tennis table clubs in Oradea. He organised and trained the Romanian teams who participated in the 1929 and 1931 editions of the world championships.

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