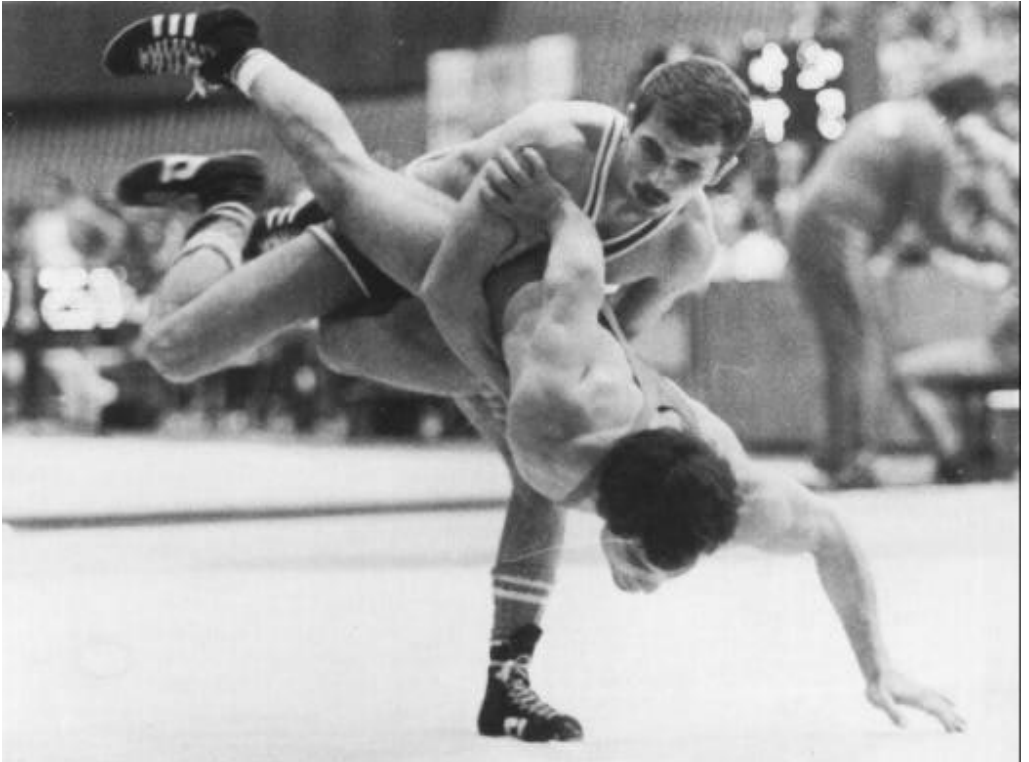


## SPORTS IN TURKEY TODAY

by TEOMAN GÜRAY

As we have just seen, the history of sports in modern Turkey began with Atatürk : "support for one's sportsman". From the very first days of the Republic he emphasised how important sports are in human life with the principle that *"one can only have a sharp mind if one has a healthy body"*.

*"I must honestly say that in order to be able to succeed in sports, rather than waiting for help or support, it is better that the whole country understand the importance of sports, learns to love sports from the bottom of its heart and accepts sports as a duty to the fatherland". "Sports is not simply superior ability of the human body, Understanding and character are also important. Strong men of limited understanding and intelligence do not believe they can easily fight those who are less strong. In my opinion an athlete must be intelligent, he must have fighting spirit and at the same time he must have character"*. That is how he laid the foundations of Turkish sports.



*Wrestling, the national sport in Turkey.*



*Football here as everywhere...*

**T**urkish athletes competed on the international level for the first time after the proclamation of the Republic in 1924. At the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris they were completely unsuccessful. But henceforth we see that in Amsterdam in 1928, Turkish wrestlers inscribed their names on the honour of roll among the top six. Berlin 1936, London 1948, Helsinki 1952, Melbourne 1956, Rome 1960, Tokyo 1964, Mexico City 1968 are the proof that they have won their gold, silver and bronze medals. Realistically, we can say that the sports situation in Turkey is far from perfect, in spite of the medals won at the Olympic



*Erol Kemah, champion wrestler at the Mediterranean Games*

Games, where Turkey ranks as number 28, but this classification also shows that Turkey is well ahead of many countries whose economies are more advanced and whose investments in sports are much greater than in our country. Today it must be said that, although Turkey has won 23 gold medals in wrestling, which we call the "sport of our ancestors", that sport has entered a period of stabilization.

In the 1970's Turkish basketball, volleyball and boxing began to gain recognition abroad, thanks to subsidies and support from sports clubs, and Turkish athletes competed on equal terms with European teams. In the 1980's Turkish team were already making it to the semi-finals and finals in European cup competitions. Among other things, the fact that our two boxers, Eyüp Can and Turgut Aykaç, won bronze medals in Los Angeles, beating many countries which are superior from a technical point of view, represents great progress for that sport in Turkey. There is no doubt that soccer is as popular with the masses in Turkey as it is throughout the world. Players transferred from their home country, the United States, have contributed to basketball, and have made it Turkey's "second sport". In addition, the government attaches particular importance to track and field, which we all consider to be the ABC of sports. Here we see Turkish athletes active on the international level, especially in the marathon, e.g. Veli Ballı, Mehmet Yurdadön, Mehmet Terzi, who performed well in the 42 km race at Frankfurt, Athens, etc. In rifle marksmanship, archery, horseback riding and wrestling, which we call the sport of the ancients, Turkish athletes have achieved favorable results in many countries around the world. Moreover, international organizations for these sports have reacted very favourably.

And now, half-way through the year 1987, Turkey is working hard to do its best for the 92nd Session, which, in my opinion, will give it an opportunity, both on behalf of the Turkish NOC and on behalf of the city of Istanbul, to send a message which will long be remembered in the press.

*T.G.*

