
The So-called Socialistic Physical Culture's Formation and Evolution in Hungary After World War II

by
MIKLOS TÖTTÖSSY
Queens College, CUNY

In the fall of 1947 the Hungarian Communist Party made public its sport program. It outlined the approaches to its goal, namely:

1. the involvement of the whole population in active sports
2. strengthening the quality of sports
3. intensifying physical education on all levels of schools
4. reorganization of sport medicine and health program

To build the fundamental blocks of the new physical culture, a government agency was needed which had the strength and the support of the state, rather than the previously divided authority between state and other social factors.

The National Sport Office (Országos Sporthivatal) came into existence. Its existence coincided with the nation's 3 year plan and its major achievements were the success of the 1948 London Olympics, the so-called "be ready to work and to fight" (MHK) movement, national championships and the impressive results of the 1949 Universiade.

During this period- just to mention some statistics- Hungary had rebuilt 475 soccer fields, 33 Olympic size swimming pools, 31 boathouses, beside the 255 newly constructed soccer fields, 3 pools and 1465 volleyball courts.

The Sport Office made very decisive steps toward sport medicine and health by having compulsory medical examinations for all persons involved in sports.

Still the progress was not enough, so in 1951 the Presidium established the National Physical Education and Sport Committee, (OTSB). To unify the sport movement a national qualification system was set up and the training plans were coordinated with the competitive calendar schedule of each sport.

A further step was realized by the organization of the Committee of National Scientific Physical Education. After 25 years of planning, the so-called People's Stadium was erected, along with 400 new soccer fields, 1000 volleyball courts and big extensions were made to the existing Olympic training camp.

All this growth was reflected in the results of the 1952 Olympic Games where the small nation of 9 million people placed 3rd on the basis of unofficial points (not medals).

From here on, sport took over the whole mass of population and the number of women athletes reached new heights. Sports became popular in the farmland where they had their own spartakiads. Of course mistakes occurred. One of the major ones was the too centralized organization, which limited many outstanding coaches and gave place for other less deserving individuals. Then the mass movement began failing, it no longer attracted large number of people. Many athletes considered their training and competition as a job, they became heroes and were celebrated throughout the nation. At times of defeat, a kind of national mourning took hold of the population. This brought with it friction between different nationalistic groups and other class elements, which led to a general destruction at about the time of the 1956 revolution.

The 1956 freedom fight brought greater difficulties for the advancement of physical culture. Many young sportsmen decided to escape to the West and still others did not return to Hungary after taking part in the Melbourne Olympic Games. Suddenly, there was a need for reinforcement of the National teams and the replacement was not available. The prestige of the nation suffered great damage.

Other mistakes occurred, such as:

- I. the leaders did not organize mass sports events
2. national championships were eliminated on lower levels
3. many clubs closed voluntarily. Why?

From 1955 until 1957 the number of clubs in operation declined 30% and the number of members decreased 37%. After the freedom fight the sport movement started to feel out new ways to pull together and to make up for lost men and material.

A giant reform was needed on all levels, from the National Physical Education Committee down to the smallest club. With combined energy this was done and the upward swing of the movement began. New rules were established and new methods were worked out to ready the National teams for International competition. The quality of sports strengthened and not only reached the level of the early 1950's but surpassed it.

The strengthening of socialism brought with it still stronger organization for sports. In 1961 the Presidium made strong steps to set up a unified mass organization. In 1963 the Hungarian Physical Education and Sport Federation guided the whole country's sport life and its main objective was to move the masses.

The change of life style was followed by an ever increasing need for sports among the people. National Sports days were organized, schools stepped up the physical education programs and great importance was given to the pre-school children and older citizen's physical needs.

This trend and direction is still being followed today, and its success can be judged from the achievements of the Hungarian athletes currently participating in international competition.