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## **Macho, Macho Mensch: Manly Jewish Sport in Central Europe, 1885-1933**

This paper examines how Central European Jews employed sport as a vehicle to achieve and demonstrate assimilation, a goal doomed to failure by increasingly intense nationalism and anti-Semitism. Nonetheless German, Austrian and Hungarian Jews embraced sport, which was deemed necessary to exhibit masculine and nationalistic characteristics and thereby prove their equality as individuals or a group to the host society. This began with the upper classes, and subsequently was adopted by the middle and lower classes.

German Jews were members of the Turnverein as early as 1816. By the 1860s they were over represented among gymnastics participants. In 1880, when Jews comprised only one percent of the German population, they comprised five percent of the German Turners. German Jews won five Olympic medals in gymnastics in 1896. The first major threat to Jewish acceptance by the Turners came in 1885 when anti-Semitism developed, particularly in the First Viennese Turnverein, nearly half of whose members were Jews. In 1887, its constitution added an "Aryan paragraph" making the club free of Jews. Other Austrian societies also excluded Jews from their membership, but the Deutsche Turnerschaft refused to go along. Jewish responses to anti-Semitic pressures, and engaging in the rites of citizenship in all its interpretations, took many forms, notably fencing. It became a very popular activity since to engage in a duel was recognition of their claims to respect and of having achieved emancipation.

After World War I, working class Jewish men responded to lack of acceptance by organizing their own athletic clubs that would decisively defeat the gentile athletes and put them in their place. Jewish labor unions and the Association of Jewish War veterans in Germany, Austria, Poland, France, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary organized sports groups. They were often utilized for protection against pogroms and anti-Semitic riots to guard synagogues and Jewish property in riots.

The role of sport and what the Hungarians envisaged for it as a means for national self-definition has also defined rather

dramatically the participation of Hungarian Jews who were economically well off, and were Emperor Franz Josef's favorite ethnic minority. Jewish leaders believed that physical education could foster Jewish assimilation. Physically strong, self-confident, and self-respecting Jews would be no different from any other good Hungarian citizen except for their religious preference. The recent feature film Sunshine recapitulates the history of sport and assimilation in Hungary.

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