



## ROMANIAN SPORTSMEN – HEROES OF THE MODERN OLYMPIC GAMES

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### Abstract

*Sport is the best ambassador of peace, friendship and understanding between nations. Through personal value and high level of performance, athletes from all over the world make their name known and also their country. Through sport, the gap between countries disappears, showing the world wide that, although the preparation conditions are not identical, thanks to the will and ambition unexpected from athletes, results are not always as expected. Furthermore, people from all over the world, privileged and disadvantaged, are equal at the start line because there is no predetermined winner.*

*Romania also joined the small states, thanks to the results of its athletes, which managed to draw the attention of the world on it. In this paper I wish to pay tribute to those who, through their efforts, both in competitions and in daily life, succeed to make us proud to be Romanian.*

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### Introduction

The first attempt of reviving the Olympic Games in the new era was made in Greece, during the 19th century, due to the enthusiasm of a Greek named Evangelios Zappas who lived in Romania. His attempts at Athens in 1859 weren't successful due to many organizational problems. Even so, these pre-olympic games built a bridge between the past and the uncertain future.(V. Grombach).

Pierre of Coubertin is the one that today holds the title of renovator of the modern Olympic Games. He practiced football, athletics, canoeing and swimming, becoming Secretary-General of the French Society Union of Athletic Sport. He made famous the maxim „mens fervida in corpora lacertoso” (heated spirit in a strong body) to replace the old saying of Juvenal „mens sana in corpore sano”, which no longer matched the spirit of the young society of the late 19th century.

Due to Pierre of Coubertin's initiative, at the first congress of C.I.O. in 1894 at Paris it was decided for Athens to be the host of the first edition of the great sport event. For the first time after a 1500 year break, in 1896, Athens was hosting the Olympic Games, an event which was highly successful.

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Romania first participated in the Olympic Games in 1900, while the Romanian Olympic Committee was founded in 1914.

During the first official participation of the Romanian delegation at the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the Olympic Games at Paris (1924) the first medal in the Olympic history of the Romanian sport was obtained by the rugby team, which got the 3<sup>rd</sup> place.

The Romanian delegation had representatives at each edition of the Olympic Games since 1924, but for two summer editions, the ones in 1932 and 1948 and the 1960 winter edition.

Romania has a total amount of 302 medals (88 gold, 94 silver and 120 bronze) won from the 1924 edition of the Olympic Games at Paris up until the London 2012 one. The most medals have been won at gymnastics. Romania has the 2<sup>nd</sup> most medals (after Hungary) in a list of the countries which never hosted the Olympic Games.

It is worth mentioning some names of famous coaches who made them known in the Olympic arenas, with exceptional disciples:

- gymnastics: Bella Karolyi, Maria Simionescu, Octavian Bellu, Mariana Bitang and Dan Grecu;
- handball: Ion Kunst-Ghermănescu, Nicolae Nedeff and Constantin Popescu;
- kayak: Nicolae Navasart, Radu Hutanu and Ivan Patzaichin;
- weightlifting: Ștefan Petrescu, Lazăr Baroga and Ștefan Achim;
- canoeing: Victor Mociani, Nicolae Gioga and Mircea Roman;
- athletics: Ioan Söter, Ion Puică, Viorica Viscopoleanu, Nicolae Mărășescu;
- swimming: Doina Sava.

The history of the contemporary Romanian sport has been written under the eyes of the current generation, from which the elite sportsmen of Romania were born, raised and performed.

Nadia Comăneci, the best gymnast of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ivan Patzaichin, the admiral of the kayak fleet, Elisabeta Lipa, the best canoer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and Iosif Sârbu, the first Romanian Olympic champion.

Iolanda Balaș (IAAF declared her the most important athlete of the XX sec.), Lia Manoliu, Viorica Viscopoleanu and others, medal winners at the most prestigious competitions: Olympic Games, European or global events, which brought fame to the Romanian sport.



## 1. Content

In this paper I will be talking about the most prized representatives of the Romanian sport: Nadia Comăneci, Ivan Patzaichin, Elisabeta Lipa, Iosif Sârbu.

**Nadia Elena Comăneci** was born on the 12th of December 1961 in Onești, Bacău county. She was named after „Nadejda” who the main character in a famous movie. The name originates from the Slavic language and means “hope”.

In an interview for the local newspaper „Adevarul” Nadia says: „Since I was a child, I had a lot of energy. My mother tried to find a more safer environment where I could use my energy. Recently, in Onesti the Simionescu family had just opened up a little gym. I entered for the first time in that gym at the age of six and discovered that the uneven bars are more interesting than the carpet beater and that those mattresses prevented me from getting injured. There, under the guidance of coach Marcel Duncan I learned how to do my first tumbling, my first cartwheel and so on. I was learning and playing at the same time. My mother was very happy to get me off her back for a couple of hours while she was taking care of the house.”

Gheorghe Brasoveanu, headmaster of the Sports School in Onesti, confessed that you needn't have to be a specialist in the field of sport to realize the potential that Nadia had. „She would have made a career in any individual sport”, he declared.

„Nadia Comăneci was a very quiet girl. In the first months she never smiled nor did something to stand out in her group. She had thought an essential feature. She never said „no” or „I can't do that”. It didn't matter what exercise she had to do or the degree of difficulty she was always ready to execute it”, explains the coach in his autobiography „Without fear”.

At the Olympic Games in 1976, in Montreal, Nadia Comăneci was able to gain, for the first time in modern Olympic gymnastics history, four maximum marks. Nadia's perfect marks were displayed as 1.00 because no one ever thought that a four digit mark would ever be awarded to a gymnast. She revolutionized the field of gymnastic. Couch, Bella Karolyi wrote about that moment “ ... and suddenly Niagra fell over the hall. The last thing I clearly saw was the display of the mark on the scoreboard, meaning that 1.00 which trotted the globe as if expressing mankind's rebellion against the all powering technique. Then everything went crazy. Amid the turmoil, reporters invaded the hall. Nadia left her shell and raised her arms up high offering the people a true image of victory.”

Among the four gold medals awarded to Romania, three were won by Nadia Comăneci. She also won one silver and one bronze medal. It was the best development in the history of a Romanian sports team at the Olympics. To rise to the level she displayed at the Olympic Games in 1976, Nadia worked very hard. Until she was nine years old she practiced two hours a day. Then, the duration increased at three hours and by the age of twelve it was increased even more. The



complexity of the exercise that Nadia made at the uneven bars was illustrated thus: even though it had 13-14 elements, the exercise was based on the combination of 150 elements. Nadia needed to repeat it 20.000 during training to do the perfect layout step-out at the balance beam.

„Nadia was an unique moment in the history of gymnastics. With her, the golden era of gymnastics has come to an end. All that will follow are going to be small technical masterpieces which will lack the unmatched charm of the girl from Onesti”.

**Patzaichin Ivan** was born on November 26, 1949 at Mila 23 in Tulcea County. He left his native village in 1967, taking the road of the capital, having only one thought in his mind: to become a champion.

He first trained at Dinamo club under the guidance of his mentor Simon Ismarciuc and after less than a year of training at Snagov (lake), at not even 18 years old, he was sent to represent Romania at the Olympics in Mexico, in kayak – canoe races.

The story of the „Admiral" who does not give the fleet, especially during the crisis, is strewn with comic and dramatic moments, all nicely blended.

Admiral's career hasn't always been brilliant and didn't start right.

At his first competition in 1967, he was disqualified. At his first international participation he defeated the Olympic champion, but he was disqualified because he exceeded paddle aisle. In Mexico, at the first Olympics in singles, he was leading for 900 yards and then he got stuck and was carried back from the boat. In Munich, his paddle broke. But he had the strength, to fight, to surpass! , because he had a dream: to become a champion.

„If you have a dream, do not let anyone compromise to get it", says Ivan Patzaichin.

Another random incident of the Admiral: „At the world championships in 1982, in Belgrade, on the first day , I won the bronze, but I felt it was absolutely necessary to win the gold. Otherwise I would have felt ashamed to come home. There was only the 10,000 meters sample left. I took off with Thomas Simionov and in the first 500 meters there was a stampede and our boat broke. We were taking water and the boat was sinking. I pulled over and I was ready to abandon. And then I had an idea. I punched the wood in the area where the leak was produced and the loose piece sat back down. The opponents had advantage, but the sample was long. At 8,000 meters I caught up with them and we won. Maybe if we had won the gold the first day, we would have dropped the 10,000m but I could not have come back home with just a bronze" said Patzaichin.



Ivan Patzaichin medals:

Olympic record: four gold medals: Mexico 1968 (C2 canoe-1,000 m), Munich 1972 (C1 canoe-1,000m), Moscow 1980 (C2 canoe-1,000m), Los Angeles 1984 (C2 canoe-1,000 m).

Three silver medals: Munich 1972 (C2 canoe-1,000m), Moscow 1980 (canoe C2-500m), Los Angeles 1984 (canoe C2-500m).

As a coach, he has won over 100 medals in all competitions.

He was awarded with the "Sports Merit grade" and "Platinum Collar" the highest distinction awarded by the International Olympic Committee. It is the only Romanian sportsman who owns it.

Elisabeta Lipa – The rower of the XX century

„Sport is my life. Throughout sports, I've made a name of myself. The sports shaped me, educated me, the sports gave me what I have and what I am currently” said the multiple champion a few years ago.

He was born on October 26 1964 in Siret, Suceava town. Elisabeta began his sports career at age 14 when he was recruited for the rowing team in Bucharest.

Starting participating in sporting competitions since the age of 16, Elisabeta is one of the few women who won medals in six different editions of the Olympics. In fact, she won a medal every time she participated in Olympics.

- 1984 Los Angeles - gold medal in the double sculls ;
- 1988 Seoul - silver medal in double sculls and bronze medal in the four oars;
- 1992 Barcelona - gold medal in singles sculls and silver in double sculls;
- 1996 Atlanta - 8 +1 gold medal rowing;
- 2000 Sidney - 8 +1 gold medal rowing;
- 2004 Athens - gold medal rowing 8 +1

After the Olympic Games in Atlanta, Elisabeta Lipa announced her retirement from the competition and stayed away from the water and rowing for three years. Romanian officials were able to convince the champion, to return and to lead on more time the female crew of 8 +1. Aged 35, Elisabeta Lipa was Romanian delegation flag bearer in the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Sydney in 2000. The XXVII Olympiad was the fifth rower participation in the Games, perfect performance achieved to defend the Olympic title in Atlanta obtained four years ago. For outstanding results that she obtained, the International Federation of Rowing Scholar gives she the title of „20-th century rower" in 2000. Also, the Romanian Olympic Committee awarded her with the "Golden Collar" for an outstanding career. Also in 2000, on June 1-st in Lucerne, Switzerland, Elisabeta Lipa received the medal "Thomas Keller", the highest distinction in rowing. The



2004 Athens Olympics approaching gave breath rumors. Romanian champion could take a break from his career in the police and the rise of her six years old son and return to rowing female team to try getting a new medal. Talking about returning to the highest level of competition, Lipa said it was the most difficult and now is time to rest. "We proved to the world that when you are determined to compete, you can do that after 40 years," said Elizabeta, —intimidating them, though, those who enjoyed its withdrawal from the competition.

#### Iosif Sirbu - Romania's first Olympic champion

He was born in 1925 on September 21 at Sibot in Alba County, but stayed there only until seven, when his father changed the agricultural work on a job in Bucharest. Danila Joseph was employed as a janitor at the gym ANEF and Joseph spent much time in the sporty atmosphere. Sirbu Joseph was the one that basically started the Romanian sports glory. In 1952, Helsinki,, shooter won the gold medal in shooting sports, Romania's first medal at Olympic Games at low caliber gun, 40 shots down. Here's how Horia Alexandrescu wrote in his book about the respective final, "Romanian Olympic Gold "in 1980:,, Free caliber weapon finalists sample low 40 shots, lying down, are called to the stand. In these moments Iosif Sirbu think of an "impossible 400": „Let's show them what we can do! That they have not heard of us." So begins one of the most fantastic final in the history of shooters.

Iosif Sarbu scored the first "ten" in the first shot, but it does not excite him, knowing that there is more to the end, so that the series "tens" continues. But this is what the opponents competing realized the meantime: Andreev, Boa, Spören, Horber and Jackson. Moments of tension flowing fast and then comes the last moment of fire. Iosif feels a chill inner bezel and showing clearly that he has a shot and achieves the "impossible 400". He must succeed at all costs! He takes some deep breaths, sit back in firing position, fit his long gun, set the target and finally block his breathing. Finger begins to pull imperceptible the trigger, millimeter by millimeter. And the lead starts, held by a wire to the heart of the target. He looked through the telescope, he sees the result, but restrain very hard his human joy. He looked curiously at the clock and observed that all firing lasted 70 minutes, this time it was possible to sample perfection shooting.

Iosif found that he won while shooting the series from position "the knee". Could not concentrate, was feeling a fatigue such as slip into his body. Finally they announced the official results, Andreev and Iosif have 400 points, victory is close to the one that have more "bite" those bullets which hit the black middle target). Thus two had tied to the world record and Olympic. Victory eventually was given to Iosif because he led with 33 shots in the middle of the target and the opponent had just 28. Then at Malmi was heard for the first time in the history the anthem of Romania.



He did not have much time to enjoy this victory. Shortly after returning from Helsinki, the eye that never betrayed him, become unfit for sport. Ophthalmologist advised him to quit. He did not accept the advice. He will target with the other eye; but how? because it is nearly impossible. He makes up a new mechanism, 'the movement of the sighting system by means of a rod. "Seemingly simple, but how complicated is to see the target. It took a great will to succeed to change eye shot. In these circumstances it is understandable 5th place at the 1956 Olympics. Later, in Rome, in 1960, after the qualification round, he can obtain just the 12th place.

He vowed to come more prepared over four years in Tokyo, but this promise has not been honored. On September 6, 1964, a few days before leaving for Japan, was found dead in house in Bucharest. Circumstances of Disappearance have never been officially explained, but it is thought he committed suicide after a medical report, not only forbade participation in the Games in Tokyo, but has forbidden to ever compete because of problems eyes. „Raised the gun for the last time, offering targeted at no 39" says Camelia Moses in the Village World Magazine February 2009.

### Conclusions

Performance sport, Olympic sport long ceased to be a mere sporting spectacle, making him a, attraction "for millions and millions of people, and sometimes, business", but still something great, unrepeatable from one edition to another Olympics. The values of the Olympic Movement grown goals are not just theoretical. One of its fundamental goals is precisely reconstruct contemporary society. Honor, dignity athletes, team spirit, fair play competitions that give evidence, make it real life models.

We must honor the Romanian Olympics that made us proud of Romania, they have made every fiber of our being to win as a chord of love for their country, that we were part of the Olympic story with millions of people around the world.

„Citius, Altius, Fortius”. „Faster, higher, stronger” - this is the motto of the Olympic Games, it must be our motto to.

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