

# History of Physical Education in Turkey and Development of Physical Education and Sports

Fatih KIYICI

Higher Education Institute of Physical Education and Sports,  
Ankara, Turkey  
[fatihkiyici@gmail.com](mailto:fatihkiyici@gmail.com)

M. Yavuz KONCA

Ataturk University,  
Erzurum, Turkey  
ykonca@hotmail.com

**Abstract :** The purpose of this study is to evaluate the attempts made to improve the progress of the physical education and sports in the history of Turkish sports- from the period of Ottoman Empire (especially between 1839-1876) to the present- and plans made for the future. Ottoman Empire made important progress the effects of which are still evident in such fields as education and sports. The appreciation for European Systems had influences on education and sports as well as any other field. The concept of sports in Turkey acquired clear position within the social life and education in this period and improved immensely. During the early years of the Republic of Turkey, “physical education” was made a requisite course in all educational institutions, which was the first decision taken in this sense in the world. In time, many strategies have been developed and sport councils have been established.

**Key Words:** Ottoman, Physical Education, Sport, Turk

## 1. Introduction

During the early foundation period of the Ottoman Empire, wrestling and archery were the sports performed certain rules being applied as well as mountain climbing, fencing and hunting, (Tayga, 1990, Iscan, 1988).

Orhan Bey, the second Ottoman Sultan, considered sport activities to be very important, and placed it among the state affairs. That encouraged the Sultans reigning after him to consider sports as important as he did, at least. This made sport activities take place in the educational institutions of the time known as “Medrese”, and “Enderun (Royal Palace Schools)”. In addition, Kırkpınar Wrestling Contest, which is one of the oldest sport organizations in the world, first appeared in the period of Ottoman Empire (According to Gumus, in 1349, and more commonly known, in 1361). The physical education and sports in the Ottoman Empire were practiced and organized as war games or for military training purposes. Therefore, these activities were not given theoretically but as physical exercise and practice in educational institutions. These institutions are: (Gumus, 1990)

a) *Tekkes (the dervish lodges)*: These were the centers of Turkish-Islam Sufism, which can also be called as public schools or schools of informal education, which educated and trained ordinary people in such fields as linguistics, religion, arts, philosophy, and sports (Bilge, 1988). In Ottoman Empire, some of the tekkes were structured as sport centers. Although wrestling was the inherited national sports for the Ottoman, other sports such as the archery, jereed, horse riding and iron mace using were also practiced in those tekkes.

Tekkes are said to be the first Ottoman centers from which the sport associations of our time were originated. However, the feature that differs them from today’s sport associations is that they offered more opportunities and better social insurance to the athletes that they supported (Soyer, 2004).

In the declining period of the Empire, “Sport Tekkes” which began losing their functions, and not serving in accordance with their purposes, existed until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as one, but the most important, of the three institutions that gave way the sport activities to be achieved (Fisek, 1983).

b) *Waqifs (The Foundations & Charity Organizations)*: The second kind of organization in the field of sports is “waqifs”. The waqifs associated with tekkes were structured as the institutions in the Ottoman Foundation system. Using their own means and reserves without demanding help from any institution, these waqifs served to help the needy, especially those people involved in sport activities and affairs.

After the invasion of Bursa, a waqif was established by Orhan Bey’s wife, Nilufer Hatun, in Pınarbası, located in the southern part of the city, where wrestlers performed their wrestling skills in wrestling

championships and thus public were entertained. At a later period of time, the waqifs associated with tekkes came to be known as “Tekkes of Wrestlers”. Such Tekkes as “Ahmet Effendi Remote Tekke” and several others, in Siraseviler District in Istanbul stand as very good examples (Bilge, 1988).

The athletes in waqifs were supported and helped by the sultans, viziers, pashas, masters, big landowners and the wealthy people of the time.

*c) Aga System (The Lordship System):* The third type of institution present in *Ottoman Empire was the Aga System which stood identical* with utmost generosity and hosting the Kirkpinar Wrestling Championship which was a kind of *Lordship System*. This institution has existed for 650 years but, strange to say, it is still considered to be a temporary system. However, it is considered that the main goal of this system has been to support sport activities. This institution is known to have been established early in the fourteenth century. (Fisek, 1983).

“Aga” is the authorized person who is responsible for inviting the wrestlers and viewers, greeting the guests, giving the feast, accommodating athletes and those accompanying them, giving the rewards, and provided all security for the wrestling championship to take place (Gumus, 1990).

## **2. Transition from the concept of Traditional Sport Institutions to Modern Sport Associations**

Associations replaced the traditional institutions which formed the sport organizations nearly in the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the period between 1839 and 1876, adaption of European System had its impact felt in the field of sports as in other grounds of life. Traditional institutions were put aside and the transition to the universal kind of organizing was accelerated. From the early beginnings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the modern sports began to improve and be played. In our country, Turkey, modern sports appeared in the beginning of 1870s, later than the Western countries. (Atabeyoğlu)

The first occasion of modern sport activities in our country was achieved by educational institutions. In the time between 1839 and 1876, in addition to the socio-economic situation and activities of missionaries, the sports became international rather than national, and European system was admired. Thus, all of these are among the factors that accelerate the process of transiting from traditional type of organizations to clubs. The first trainers of gymnastics such as Curel, Monsieur, Stangali, were brought from abroad. The gymnasiums in schools were decorated by them.

The brothers, Nicola and Elibardi, educated in those private gymnasiums opened in 1904, participated in 1906 Athens Olympic Games, in the branch of gymnastics. Jorj (Yorgo) received the championship in the field of climbing up 10 m. long rope (Keten 1974) by a difference of seconds ( Kahraman 1995). In our country, the transition from traditional sport system to the system of associations took place in the period between 1839- 1876, the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Sumer, 1997).

During the Tanzimat Period when the Constitutional Monarchy was first declared, football began to spread fast and became institutionalized in our country like it did all around the world. In the time of Ottoman Empire, the first act of establishing associations was achieved by foreigners.

The association named “Imagene” was founded in Moda, and Kadıköy Districts in Istanbul, and the associations named “Football” and “Rugby” were established in Izmir by Englishmen., again the association named “Elpis” was established by the Greek (Fisek, 1983). In addition, in 1867, the association named “Imperid Yatching and Boating” was established ( Kahraman, 1995). These associations are known as “The First Established Sport Associations or Clubs”. However, “The First Established Turkish Association” is Black Stocking, in 1899, according to Fisek; or is Besiktas, in 1903, according to Bilge (Fisek, 1983, Bilge, 1988). During the Ottoman Era, football was monopolized by foreigners until 1908, the year when The First Declaration of Constitutional Monarchy was announced. In this period, Turkish nationals were forbidden by the government to gather and establish associations and clubs, whereas foreigners experienced no difficulty in becoming associated.

During the period between 1839- 1876, physical education and sports were considered to be subjects related to life and began to be included in the subjects taught in schools. In 1863, the tools and facilities needed were provided by military schools, and ‘ physical education and sports’ began to be involved in the subjects to be taught in the Military Academies and Military Senior High Schools ( Bilge, 1988, Fisek, 1983).

The Alliance of Gymnastics of Turkey is the first national organization with many sport organizations and clubs, which left its mark on the last period of the Ottoman Empire. The Alliance of Gymnastics of Turkey, the main purpose of which was putting an end to the confusion in the leagues of Istanbul, was founded on 27<sup>th</sup> of January 1921 by 14 different sport clubs, became official in 8<sup>th</sup> of June 1922. The Alliance is important because it gathered the different sport clubs together, and unite these clubs which were run according to different write regulations (Hicilylmaz).

### **3. The Present Status of the Sports Policy in Turkey**

Turkey, recording immense improvements in the field of sports in 2000s, unfortunately, came to the edge of the period of regression. Unfortunately, originating from the question of how and from where to provide financial resources, the attempts already started to improve infrastructure and all other services were replaced by cancellation of national and international contests, and many training and sport camp programs.

But, in the last 5-year period, a great improvement has been made in the amount of the budget provided by the sport federations. Also, candidatures for big organizations were in hand, and those were achieved successfully. The most conspicuous ones are Europe Championship League, Summer Universiade, and Europe and World Basketball Championship. Turkey, which has a good place in summer games, also, was assigned to organize the 2011 Universiade Winter Games. However, new facilities for many kinds of winter games have already began to be constructed. Such work has provided opportunities to train new professional athletes for many new branches of sports such as ski- jumping, curling, short track, and ice- hockey. These investments will have immense impact in the short run, but their best contributions will certainly be benefited in the long run. In Turkey, with the youngest population of Europe, the more we get children and teenagers to engage in sport activities, the healthier generations we can have.

'Sports' is 'over' politics, and its solemn principle is to serve the public. The percentage of the young-between 12 years and 24 years old- in the total population of the country is about 30%, in our country while all developed countries strive to increase the percentage of the young people in their population, which is becoming lower day by day. The main objective of our country is to determine to get its potential population ready for the years to come, and to provide them with opportunities of putting these years into good use. (DPT. 2000)

#### **3.1. Autonomous Federations**

Sport federations must have their own autonomous constitutions, which are made up of the representatives of clubs and the sportsmen upon whom nobody will have any influence. In the developed western countries governed by democracy, the governments organize the sport activities, and, in the time of need, they conduct support, control, and , even, provide facilities and inspect the sport organizations ( DPT, 2000)

#### **3.2. Sponsorships**

All the developed countries and business companies that realize the great power of the sports, are at pains to propagandize for themselves and promote their products through sport organizations and championships, thus, to increase the amount of their trade, both in domestic and foreign markets. Because the sport has such a big power, it is considered to be beneficial to market the national and international sport contests in order to benefit from the business companies in the fields of industry, agriculture and trade.

In this way, except the budget provided by the government for sport activities, the contributions of the private sector to such kind of activities will also be available and more achievements will be possible to record. In order to encourage the people to sponsor the sport activities, some arrangements are needed to provide the exemption or discount from the taxes, for the donations to the sport funds and for the owners of these donations ([www.sportoto.gov.tr](http://www.sportoto.gov.tr))

In the eighth 5-Year -Development Plan of the State of Planning Organization, (in 2000), it has been noted that Turkey has not been able to reach the expected level in regards to the sport activities yet; Neither in building facilities, nor providing the enough involvement of the public is there a positive indicator. Although some individual achievements were recorded, it was also reported that the sport hasn't become a matter of common philosophy in our society yet.

### **4. Conclusion and Suggestions**

Making people physically stronger and psychologically healthier and making sports common in society depends on establishing social relations among people.

Each sector in the society has its own responsibilities for spreading the consciousness of sports, and the government must arrange the pre-services, services and laws, which have very close relation with sports accordingly. To make it possible for every member of the society to have opportunities of participating in sports is the ideal objective. To achieve this goal, the roles of the improvements needed to be made in each individual's social and academic status, educational institutions and the devices of mass media cannot be denied. In society, with the guidance of the best skilled leaders of each and every field, some sport activities such as jogging,

including the groups of the disabled and the scouts, will have unbelievably significant impact on achieving the goals first related to health and then to performance sports.

The present status of sports in Turkey is somewhat worrying. Although the society is densely young-populated, the engagement of young people in sport activities is far from being satisfying. Some kind of a tendency to passively participate can only be seen in football and basketball. After investigating the degree of suitability of the new sports to the provisions, construction of facilities should take place.

The present high schools are good in theoretical education, but there are problems in practice, and we should eliminate all these problems. In the light of the notion that professional athletes should be trained from the early years of their childhood, it should be considered to select some primary schools as pilot ones in each city and encourage them to apply pre-service programs in order to have a basis for the future high schools with sport education.

The present management system should also be rearranged, and it should have a democratic and autonomous structure. However, studies of efficiency and performance should be made in addition to the radical arrangements in regard to the pre-service programs. Federations should be free both financially and managerially. A certain national policy, a self-governing sport organization and the objectives and plans formed accordingly should be provided. However, the financial sources gathered should be spent in a functional, productive and rational manner in order to achieve the objectives and programs.

In the light of the present situation around the world, the opinions and suggestions about "Developing Strategies for Training Professional Athletes" should be discussed by the experts of the field, and the best environment should be created with the support of sponsors.

## References

Atabeyoğlu, C. Spor Tanzimattan Önce Cumhuriyete Türkiye Ansiklopedisi, İletişim yayınları, 1474-1479.

Bilge, N. (1988). Türkiye’de Beden Eğitimi Öğretmeninin Yetiştirilmesi. Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları No:1095, 17-36.

DPT. Sekizinci Beş Yıllık Kalkınma Planı, Beden Eğitimi, Spor ve İstanbul Olimpiyatları Özel İhtisas Komisyonu Raporu, DPT Yayını No: 2513, Ankara, 2000.

Fişek, K. (1983). Spor Yönetimi. Ankara: A. Ü. SBF Yayınları No:515, 256-268.

Gümüş, A. (1990). Kırkpınar Güreşleri. Ankara: GSGM Yayını No:90, 3,40.

Hiçyılmaz E, Türkiye’de Spor, b.y.y. b.t.y., Yeni Yüzyıl Kitaplığı Türkiye’nin Sorunları Dizisi No:1 1, s.31 - 32

Kahraman, A. (1995). Osmanlı Devleti’nde Spor. Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları No:1697, 638, 640, 641.

Sümer, R. (1997). Türkiye’de Spor Kulüplerinin Yapıları Yönetimdeki Yerleri ve Sorunları Boş Zamanları Değerlendirme Alanları ve Toplumsal Çevreleri İle İlişkileri Üzerine Bir Araştırma. Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi. Gazi Üniversitesi Sağlık Bilimleri Enstitüsü Beden Eğitimi ve Spor ABD, 68, Ankara.

Tayga, Y. (1990). Türk Spor Tarihine Genel Bakış, 8, Ankara.

Soyer F. (2004). Osmanlı Devletinde(1839-1908 Tanzimat Dönemi) Beden Eğitimi ve Spor Alanındaki Kurumsal Yapılanmalar ve Okul Programlarındaki Yeri Konusunda Bir İnceleme. Gazi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi 24; 1: 209-225

www.sportoto.gov.tr (2002).