

THE FOUNDING AND FIRST YEARS OF ACTIVITY OF NAGYVÁRADI ATLÉTIKAI CLUB FOOTBALL TEAM 1910 – 1914

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ABSTRACT. The year 2020 marks one hundred and ten years since the founding of Nagyváradi Atlétikai Club (in Romanian: Clubul Athletic Oradea), which in matter of football was one of the reference sports groups in the city of Nagyvárád in the first half of the 20th century. Due to this anniversary, we set out to present the history of this team, from the moment when it was founded up to the outbreak of World War I. Through its contents, this paper contributes to a better understanding of the past of this sports team and, in the same time, it represents an acclaim of its founders, leaders and players. The first part of this paper presents the founding of Nagyváradi Atlétikai Club team, its first years of activity, its attendance to competitions, international matches, its contribution to shaping iconic players for local football and for the national teams of Hungary and Romania, and then it presents the headquarters, playing fields, coaches and main leaders of the team. Through its contents, this paper is of interest, not only for those who just want to expand their general knowledge, but also for people who study Nagyvárád's football history.

Keywords: *Nagyváradi Atlétikai Club, Clubul Athletic Oradea, football*

REZUMAT. *Constituirea și primii ani de activitate a echipei de fotbal Nagyváradi Atlétikai Club 1910 – 1914.* În anul 2020 s-au aniversat o sută zece ani de la constituirea echipei de fotbal Nagyváradi Atlétikai Club care a fost una dintre grupările sportive de referință ale fotbalului din orașul Nagyvárád în prima jumătate a secolului al XX-lea. Având în vedere acest moment aniversar, ne-am propus să prezentăm istoria acestei echipe, începând cu înființarea ei și până la izbucnirea Primului Război Mondial. Prin conținutul său, lucrarea contribuie la mai buna cunoaștere a trecutului acestei formații sportive și, în același timp, reprezintă o recunoaștere a celor care au înființat echipa, a

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conducătorilor și a jucătorilor ei. În prima parte, lucrarea se referă la constituirea echipei Nagyváradi Atlétikai Club, primii săi ani de activitate, participarea ei în competiții, meciurile sale internaționale, contribuția la formarea unor jucători reprezentativi pentru fotbalul local și pentru selecționatele Ungariei și cea a României, apoi prezintă sediile, terenurile, antrenorii și conducătorii săi mai importanți. Prin conținutul său, lucrarea prezintă interes, atât pentru cei care doresc doar să-și lărgescă aria de informare, dar și pentru cei care studiază trecutul fotbalului orașului Nagyvárád.

Cuvinte cheie: *Nagyváradi Atlétikai Club, Clubul Athletic Oradea, fotbal*

The Founding of Nagyváradi Atlétikai Club Football Team

In addition to its cultural, architectural and ecclesiastical values, Nagyvárád (in Romanian: Oradea) is a city of interest in matter of sports as well. The 20th century was called the century of sports because the sport phenomenon has become universal and it amplified. The founding of sports associations and football departments in Nagyvárád contributed to the development of the round ball game.

The football department of Nagyváradi Atlétikai Club (NAC) (in Romanian: Clubul Athletic Oradea) was founded when Transylvania was still part of Austria-Hungary. At that time, a young journalist named Pásztor Bertalan was working in Nagyvárád, who had initiatives with liberal features and a fiery look in his eyes. A good friend of the poet Ady Endre, he showed a special passion for sports and looked for ways to develop local football. He gave examples from Budapest, where sports associations such as Magyar Testgyakorlók Köre (MTK), Ferencvárosi Torna Club (FTC), Budapest Atlétikai Klub and Vác Futball Club already existed (Schön, 1981).

The young footballers led by Mikló Béla, Szabó Andor and Friedländer Sándor won the moral trust and financial contribution of four personalities of the time: Dr. Dénes Sándor (lawyer), Dr. Kovács Kálmán, Dr. Jónás Emil and Lakatos Béla (physical education teacher) in order for Nagyváradi Atlétikai Club to be founded.



Picture 1. Emke Cafe ("Emke Kávéház", 1911) between 1910-1920 ("Insigne", n.d.)



Picture 2. Crest of NAC

In the center of Nagyváradi, in a booth of Emke Cafe (set up on the ground floor of the current Hotel Astoria) on May the 26th, 1910, on Thursday, at 20:30, the founding meeting of the Nagyvárad Atlétikai Club took place (Picture 1). The founding members were: Grünstein Béla (Bernát) (lawyer), Jancsó Béla, Szabó Andor (corporate director), Kovács László, Dr. Jónás Emil, Kovács Károly, Engel Dezső (dentist), Schmidt Béla, Rosenfeld Henrik (officer at Egyesült Nagyvárad László és Hunyady Gőzmalom), Horváth Ferenc, Dr. Kovács Kálmán, Lebovits János, Mikló Béla, Dr. Marton János, Kun Ármin, Elekes and Rónay. They voted on the members of the club's board of directors: director: Dr. Jónás Emil (president), Dr. Kovács Kálmán (cashier), Szabó Andor (chief secretary) and Mikló Béla (football department coordinator). The latter was the one who knew best the "football" phenomenon. The club's crest and colors were chosen: white-green (Picture 2) (Török, 1937).

The regulation regarding the organization and functioning of the club was published in the Official Gazette of Hungary no. 118, 298 ("A Nagyvárad Atlétikai Club", 1910).

The purpose of the club was: "educating the members, promoting physical education, maintaining good terms, providing material support, developing feelings of camaraderie, sports training of young forces" (Fleisz, 2007, p. 101).

In the first year of the club's activity, the playing field of NAC team was in Városliget - Bunyitai Liget (today I.C. Brătianu Park), with a stony surface that caused many injuries, and starting with August the 20th, 1911, the football team moved to the new location at Grădina Rhédey, called "Sporttér" (which now is called Stadionul Tineretului) (Sas, 1911).

During the period preceding World War I, NAC was active locally and regionally through inter-city and inter-club matches.

Matches of Nagyváradi Atlétikai Club football team throughout 1910

In its first year of activity, NAC applied to join the Magyar Labdarúgó Szövetség (MLSZ) (Hungarian Football Association). The main criterion for joining was to play match - rematch with a team already registered with the association (Deák, Gecse, S. Tóth, Simon, Szilágyi & Thury, 2010).

In 1910, NAC had a total of four friendly matches: two with Debreceni Torna Egylet (DTE) and two with Kolozsvári Vasutas Sport Club (KVSC). The DTE football team was founded in 1899, one of its players being the Hungarian poet Ady Endre (Fésüs, 1994).

The first official match took place on July the 31st, 1910, in Bunyitay Liget, at 17:00, between the NAC and KVSC teams. The score was 2-1 for the away team (Földessy, 1926).

We must mention the tenured players of the NAC team because that was the first page of a glorious 34-year-long era: Welzer II, Welzer I, Muharos, Palocsay, Mikló Béla, Kalmár, Dietrich, Winkler, Róna, Balázs, Kont. In the second half of the season, in the autumn of the same year, the team from Nagyváradi won against KVSC by 5-1 (Török, 1937).

The selected teams of Nagyváradi, Kolozsvár and Debrecen

Up until the outbreak of World War I, the selected teams from Nagyváradi and Debrecen met five times. NAC obtained four victories and one defeat. Often, the meetings brought about many accidents, but also violent incidents.

The sports dailies of Debrecen called the Grădina Rhédey "Mészárszék" (Slaughterhouse), and the players of Partium called the athletes of Debrecen "barbarians". Many times, at the end of the match, the players were chased away with stones thrown by the spectators (Dénes & Sándor, 2011).

In the spring of 1912, NAC Chief Secretary Pásztor Bertalan asked the presidents of the football teams of Debrecen to make a selection of footballers to organize a series of friendly inter-city matches between Nagyvárad and Debrecen. The mayor of Nagyvárad, Rimler Károly, was a great football fan, who watched the team's matches every weekend. After a few weeks of discussions, the presidents of the football teams from the two cities agreed that the players should wear the colors and the coat of arms of their hometown on their shirts (Szegeci, 2005).

The first inter-city match held in Nagyvárad on June the 23rd, 1912 was watched by more than 4000 spectators and was won by NAC with the score of 4 -1. The team from Debrecen was supported by about 100 football fans. Tents and a small buffet were set up for the match (Szép, 1912). A comic incident took place during the match refereed by Vámos Soma. After he ruled offside, Nagyvárad's mayor Rimler Károly, who was also present at the match, asked MLSZ secretary Steinhübel Ödön why the match had been interrupted. Ödön replied that the player had been in the "out of play" position. The irritated mayor exclaimed, "How can he rule offside if I dind't seen it?" (Röser, 1912).

In the five matches played, the team of Debrecen was made up, in a similar proportion, of the players of the teams DTE, Debreceni Kereskedelmi Alkalmazottak Sport Egyesülete (DKASE) and Debreceni Munkás Testedző Egyesület (DMTE) while out of the total of 55 players selected to represent Nagyvárad, 46 were players of the NAC team, many of them residing in Vienna or Budapest (Dénes & Sándor, 2011).

In a match held on the banks of Sebes Körös river (in Romanian: Crișul Repede river), the selected team of Nagyvárad won with the score of 3-1 against the selected team of Kolozsvár. The players of the selected team of Nagyvárad: Standing: Hirsch (NAC), Katona Béla (NAC), Kürschner (NAC) (coach-player), Kucsera (NAC), Stepán (Nagyvárad Sport Egylet) (NSE), Oblátt Imre (NAC), Niessner (NSE), Strasszer (NAC). Sitting: Lassingleitner (Nagyvárad Sport Club) (NSC), Jakobovits (NAC) and Kovács (NAC). Pásztor Bertalan – chief-secretary NAC (in a suit) (Picture 3).



Picture 3. The selected team of Nagyvárad and of Kolozsvár in 1913 (Demjén, 1989)

The attendance of NAC team to the regional championships of Hungary

From the first year, the NAC management also set up the second team for junior training for the big team. In 1912, NAC had 3 football teams (NAC I, NAC II and the junior team).

Between 1910 and 1911, the cities of Arad, Timișoara and Cluj organized their own championships, after which the competition was extended, becoming the championship of Transylvania (Luchide, Gațu, Mihăilescu, 1968). In reality, it was called the regional championship (vidéki bajnokság). It needs to be noted that MLSZ organized football championships since 1901 for teams from Budapest, and the 1907-1908 season was the first championship for teams from outside of Hungary's capital. The winners of the zonal series played a final tournament, played in eliminatory system.

The 1911 - 1912 football season meant the first time attendance of the NAC football club to the football championship of Hungary, Central Zone, along with the teams: NSE, DKASE, DMTE, DTE, Miskolci Munkás Testedző Egyesület (MMTE) and Miskolci Sport Egyesület (MSE). Led by coach Szabó Andor, it ended the season on the second place, ahead of the local team, NSE ("Vidéki Bajnokság - Középmagyarországi kerület", n.d.).

The Nagyváradi Törekvés Munkás Testedző Egyesület (in Romanian: Asociația de Cultură Fizică a Muncitorilor Stăruința Oradea) was founded in 1912 under the management of the director Löweinstein Zsigmond. In the same year, Egyetértés Sport Egylet was established. In the following period, the two teams represented a rivalry for the NAC team (Picture 4). The establishment of the Törekvés football section meant a growing popularity of the sport among the workers, and the expenses of playing football were minimal in comparison to fencing or horse riding, considered to be the sports of the aristocrats.



Picture 4. a - b. Medal of the Törekvés rematch – NAC (without year)
(collection of Lukács Imre Róbert)

The front side of the item shows an attack in front of the goal, watched by the spectators. The back side features a wreath of olive branches and, in four rows, the inscription Törekvés - N.A.C. Revans IX. 15. Size: 40x40 mm. Weight: 27.6 g.

In the meantime, in the Kingdom of Romania, towards the end of 1912, along with the founding of the Federation of Romanian Sports Societies (FSSR), football received a new organization. In the FSSR, the activity was led by the Football-rugby Commission. In 1919 the two branches separated into the "Union of Football Clubs Association" and the "Rugby Commission". The FSSR had as president King Ferdinand - founding member - and as general secretary Prince Carol (Postolache, 1979). Later, the "Association of Football Clubs" joined the "Football Association Committee" (after Ghibu & Todan, 1970) and the "Central Football Commission" (after Luchide, Gațu & Mihăilescu, 1968).

As the sport with the round ball was spreading, the interest in winning the title of the best team of the region began to increase as well. The transfer of valuable players from the Hungarian first division was a vital factor for sports associations outside Budapest. So did the NAC team, which in the season of 1912-1913 bought a record number of players with whom they could line up a complete team (Földessy, 1926).

The most distinguished players were Hanny from Vienna (Dénes & Sándor, 2011), Strasser Emil who had played at Kereskedelmi Alkalmazottak Országos Egyesülete (Polónyi, 1912) or Kürschner Izidor from MTK. The latter became the captain of the white-greens and opened a café, the "Kürschner Club Kávéház", and a sports equipment store in little Paris on the banks of Pece (in Romanian: Peța) (Herendi, 1912).

In order to stop the exodus of players from other cities and to support amateurism, in 1913, MLSZ introduced a new regulation against professionalism: the transfer of a player could take place only after they have played at least 6 months for their new team (Földessy 1926).

In the 1912-1913 edition of the football championship, East Zone, the Nagyváradi vidéki group out of a total of 16 NAC matches, won 15 + one by default, accumulating a maximum score of 32 points with 137 goals scored and only 6 conceded (Dénes, Sándor & Bába, 2013).



Picture 5. Czuvinán Andor & **Picture 6.** The NAC team in 1913 (Luncz, Rédiger, Raditz, Katona, Hoffmann Árpád (Kabos, 1913) Kürschner, Strasser, Nyúl, Kovács, Busi, Postarik, Máthé) (Speidl, 1920)

NAC won the East Zone final against Ungvári AC with the score of 7-2. In this match, the striker Czuvinán Andor (NAC), who was 14 years old and the shortest player of the team, scored 4 goals (Picture 5). On July the 13th, 1913, in the final of the regional championship, NAC was defeated at home by 3-0 by the champion of the North Zone Kassai Athletikai Klub (Dénes & Sándor, 2011).

Kürschner Dóri, the captain of the team, had a significant contribution to the performance. The first team was made up of the following players: Kürschner Dóri, Strasser Emil, Katona Béla, Oblatt Imre, Kovács, Hirsch Elemér, Máthé, Kucsera, Schossi and Jakab (Speidl, 1913). Bakos, Oblatt, Kürschner, Strasser, Katona formed the line of attack. Kucsera István was a two-time champion of the national football division with the FTC team (1908 - 1909 and 1909 - 1910).

In the East Zone Championship, Nagyvárad group, 1913 - 1914 season, NAC finished on the first place with a maximum score of 32 points, qualifying themselves to the East Zone finals. NAC played a tied match (1-1) (90 minutes + 2 x 15 minutes extra time) with the Ungvári AC team. NAC challenged the result as the coach of Ungvári AC sent three players on the field who were not legitimized. MLSZ accepted the appeal, and NAC received the 3 points (Speidl, 1914a). NAC aligned the following formation: Postarik, Könczey, Csobán, Robogó, Rózsavölgyi, Jónás, Brán, Hamburger, Kürschner, Strasser, Horváth (Dénes & Sándor, 2011).

According to magyarfutball.hu, NAC did not show up for the rematch due to the outbreak of World War I ("Vidéki bajnokság – Keleti kerület", n.d.). An article in the Sporthirlap newspaper mentions a completely different reason. The vice-president of the NAC club, Pásztor Bertalan, stated that he received the telegram sent by MLSZ announcing the day of the match only in the evening, although this telegram had arrived to Nagyvárad that morning. The justification was not accepted and the NAC was declared the defeated team. Ungvári AC got qualified for the trophy for best provincial team (Speidl, 1914b).

Although this final did not take place, the editors of the sports magazine "Sportvilág" considered the NAC team one of the best teams in the regional championship along with Tatabányai Sport Club, Győri Egyetértés Torna Osztály, Temesvári Kinizsi Sport Egyesület and Pozsonyi Torna Egyesület. The level at which these teams were playing was equal to the level of those in the second league of the Budapest Championship (Dénes, Sándor & Bába, 2013).

The international matches of Nagyvárad Atlétikai Club team

The Bishop Auckland amateur team's visit to Nagyvárad on April the 13th, 1912 was good propaganda for football in this region (Kormányos, 2019).

It was the first football team from England to visit the city of Nagyvárad (Picture 7).

"Last night the silence in Bémer Tér (now Piața Ferdinand) was interrupted by a crowd gathered in front of the Pannonia Hotel (now the Queen Mary restaurant). The cars were lined up one after the other, and the young people wore multicolored badges. The cars had the Hungarian flag, the blue and white flag of the city of Nagyvárad. The cars had the and a foreign one, that of England. Despite the cold outside, about 1500 fans gathered up" (Sas, 1912b, p. 3)



Picture 7. The advert of the match (Sas, 1912a)

Saturday's match brought together the good people of Nagyvárad. The snowfall in the second half and the white equipment of the NAC players did not disturb the game. The parade of the islanders' team was watched by 2000 spectators at the end of which the English won with the score of 8-0 (Sas, 1912c).

NAC lined up the following team: Sisi (goalkeeper), Szücs, Szrenka (defenders), Milodanovics, Stotter, Weisz (midfielders), Niessner, Hanny, Kovács, Szkriván, Vécsey (forwards). For this match Niessner Aladár was borrowed from NSE (Sas, 1912b).

In the spring of 1913, the Austrian team Floridsdorfer Athletics Sports Club visited the city of Nagyvárad where they played two international matches in the company of the NAC and NSE teams. NAC won with the score of 2 - 0 (Sas, 1913).

Headquarters, presidents and coaches of Nagyvárad Atlétikai Club team

The two local newspapers 'Nagyvárad' and 'Nagyvárad Napló' show that between 1910 and 1914, the members of the association met at cafés and discussed important matters of the association. During those five years they visited four different locations (Table 1).

Table 1. The location where important matters of the NAC association were discussed

Period	Name of the café	Current name of the location	Current address
1910 - 1911	<i>Emke</i> Kávéház	Restaurantul <i>Astoria</i>	Str. Teatrului nr. 1-2
1911 - 1913	<i>Szalon</i> kávéház	Cafeneau <i>Pellini Evolution</i>	Str. Primăriei nr. 2
1913	<i>Kürschner Club</i> Kávéház	Bazár bérház színház oldalán	Str Madách Imre
1913 - 1914	<i>Pannónia</i> Kávéház	Restaurantul <i>Queen Mary</i>	Str. Teatrului nr. 1-2

At the end of 1913, the football player Kürschner Izidor announced that he would close his café, due to the fact that it was not a prosperous business for him. He wanted to improve and take a coaching course in England and then work for a football team in Hungary (Röser, 1913).

Between 1910 and 1914, the first NAC football team had five coaches and three presidents (Table 2 and 3).

Table 2. The coaches of the NAC football team between 1910-1919

Season	1910 - 1911	1911 - 1912	1912 - 1913	1913 - 1914	1914 - 1919
Surname and Name	Mikló Béla*	Szabó Andor	Stotter Aladár*	Kürschner Isidor*	ifj. Horváth Ferenc

Note: * = coach-player; Stotter Aladár between 1912 - 1913 was assisted by Grell János (assistant coach)

Table 3. The presidents of NAC sports association between 1910-1919

Season	1910 – 1911	1911 – 1913	1913 – 1919
Surname and Name	dr. Jónás Emil	dr. Dénes Sándor	dr. Adorján Emil

Note: Pásztor Bertalan chief secretary between 1912 – 1914 and vice president between 1914 – 1919 coordinated the NAC football team in an exemplary manner

Players in Hungary's and Romania's national teams

Hirsch Elemér, the player of the NAC team between 1912 and 1913, attended the Olympics in Paris in 1924, was selected five times for the Romanian national team (1922 - 1924) and coached the tricolors between 1947 and 1948. He was one of players of the first match played by the Romanian national team on June the 8th, 1922 (“Hirsch Elemér”, n.d.).

Kürschner (Szűcs) Izidor Dori, the player of the NAC team between 1912 and 1914, was called to the Hungarian national team five times between 1907 and 1911. Kürschner Izidor was the only one from the team who had a long coaching career. He trained for 22 years in Hungary, Germany, Switzerland and Brazil. As assistant selector of the Swiss national team he won the silver medal at the Olympic Games in Paris (1924) (“Kürschner Izidor”, n.d.).

The coach - player of the NSE team, Niessner Aladár, was the first player from Nagyvárad co-opted into the Hungarian national football team (five appearances: 1903 - 1907) (Demjén, 1989). He has also been lended to the NAC team several times.

Nyúl Ferenc was the player of the NAC team in 1913 for a short period because MLSZ did not approve his final transfer because within six months he had also played for a football team from Debrecen, and according to the regulations in force at that time he could not be transferred. He was nine times champion of the national football division with MTK and was selected four times for the Hungarian national team (1916 - 1920) (“Nyúl Ferenc”, n.d.).

Conclusion

The management and members of the NAC association came largely from the Jewish community of the city of Nagyvárad and had a modern vision regarding the development of local football. Unfortunately, the storm of time removed it from the battlefield, but its memory remained with us. The legend was passed on from father to son. The performance of the NAC was possible due to the sportsmanship and sacrifice of the Jews of Nagyvárad (Schön, 1981).

NAC managed to popularize football among the locals, so that, before the outbreak of World War I, it became the favorite sport of the inhabitants. According to Fehér (1913), “more than a year has passed, and the inhabitants of Nagyvárád, in addition to the traditional langaméta and duplex, play football, athletics and swimming. We could not imagine that the game of football can attract so many supporters and spectators in such a short time. Every Sunday, there was a massive public presence at the NAC team’s matches” (p. 68). After its establishment, the association also had departments for fencing, gymnastics, boxing, athletics, skating, free wrestling, swimming and tennis.

In the first 4 years, the NAC team got to play against the best teams in the regional championship, the players' technique was perfected, their own style of play was developed, the team spirit strengthened, and the footballers imposed respect for the following decades. Not financial reasons, but the sincere love for the game of football was the reason for which they've improved their playing level. At the same time, the fans lined up behind their favorite team and there was no bad weather that could keep them away from their favorite matches.

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