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# The Inclusion and Exclusion of Children in Organized Sports in Norway, 1850–1900

Gudmund Skjeldal\*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Norwegian School of Sport Sciences – Norvège

## Résumé

**Children** took part in organized sports in Norwegian cities as early as the 1850s, through newly established gymnastics associations. In the following decade, these gymnastics-, or rather German Turnen-societies, also organized competitions for children, particularly in ice-skating. Ski associations, too, arranged competitions for children aged approximately six to fourteen during this pioneering period. However, during the three last decades of the 19th century, children were increasingly excluded from civilian sports competitions, particularly in endurance-based activities. This shift was driven by doctors and military officers who advocated a new direction - or exclusion of children from sports altogether. Competitive sports thereafter became an activity primarily for young adults, and with a few exceptions, for men only.

The role of children in organized civilian sports is an underexplored topic in Nordic sports history. Newspapers, yearbooks, and association histories provide insights into a tradition that was later challenged by medical and militarized discourses. It was argued that children should not exert themselves in endurance competitions, as it was neither healthy nor beneficial. Only in the 1960s did children and adolescents truly become part of civilian sports in Norway. Since then, the Norwegian Confederation of Sports has implemented numerous rules and regulations for children's sports, presenting itself as a progressive leader in promoting healthy and appropriate sports for children worldwide. The roots of these ideas can be traced back to the 19th century.

**Gudmund Skjeldal** is an Associate Professor of Sports History at the Norwegian School of Sport Sciences. In his upcoming book, *Children Stars: The Remarkable History of Children and Sports in Norway* (Norwegian, Cappelen Damm, 2026) he explores how children were included in-and excluded from-the early development of organized sports in Norway.

**Mots-Clés:** Childen, organized sports, Norway

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\*Intervenant