

---

# The Limits of Olympic Universalism: Hungary and the Postwar Sport Boycott

Nikoletta Sipos-Onyestyák<sup>\*1</sup>, Péter Farkas , and Katalin Szikora

<sup>1</sup>Hungarian University of Sports Science – Hongrie

## Résumé

Before World War I, Hungary occupied a respected position within international sport as a founding member of the International Olympic Committee. By 1914, Budapest had obtained priority to host the 1920 Olympic Games, a recognition rooted in sporting achievement, organizational preparation, and close personal ties within the Olympic leadership. The war and its aftermath abruptly reversed this position.

In the postwar reconfiguration of international sport, Hungary became subject to a coordinated sport boycott affecting the defeated Central Powers. Although the IOC avoided formal sanctions, the practical mechanisms of exclusion operated through host-city invitations, travel restrictions, and the policies of international federations. As a result, Hungary was deprived both of the organization of the Olympic Games and of participation in the 1920 Antwerp Olympics. This situation reflected a wider tendency in which postwar sport became entangled with political retribution and moral categorization, distancing itself from the proclaimed universality of athletic competition.

Resistance to the boycott emerged primarily from neutral and non-Entente states, particularly in Scandinavia, Switzerland, Italy, and the Netherlands. Through continued sporting contacts and international competitions, these actors challenged the durability and legitimacy of postwar sporting isolation. Within this context, Gyula Muzsa, co-president of the Hungarian Olympic Committee and IOC member, played a key role in sport diplomacy by advocating reintegration and emphasizing athletic performance as the most effective response to political marginalization. Hungarian participation in international events outside the Olympic framework served as a means of demonstrating sporting vitality and moral legitimacy.

The Hungarian experience after World War I illustrates how modern sport functioned as a field in which political power, moral judgment, and international cooperation intersected. The gradual erosion of the boycott in the early 1920s suggests that, despite deep postwar divisions, international sport retained a limited but significant capacity to rebuild transnational connections.

**Mots-Clés:** Sport boycott, Isolation, Reintegration, Hungary, Postwar era

---

<sup>\*</sup>Intervenant