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# From Perfection to Pressure: The Relationship Between Nadia Comăneci and Béla Károlyi in the Securitate Archives and the Press of the Era (1976–1981)

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## Résumé

After the 1976 Montreal Olympic Games, Nadia Comăneci's trajectory entered a period in which athletic success became increasingly tied to ideological pressure and state control. Her professional, personal, and social path became a clear example of how the communist regime monitored and managed its elite athletes. Her relationship with coach Béla Károlyi, as well as with the Romanian Communist Party structures, grew more complex, while her powerful public image began to be tightly regulated by the authorities. In this context, Nadia's evolution up to 1981, the year the Károlyis defected, reveals the tensions between performance, personal freedom, and political control.

The analysis draws on documents from the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (CNSAS) and Romanian sports press articles accessed via the Arcanum platform. The documents consisting of informative notes, competition reports, interviews, articles, and correspondence, highlight Nadia Comăneci's professional and personal evolution, as well as the changes in her relationship with Béla Károlyi.

The data indicate a period marked by Nadia's isolation and strict surveillance, accompanied by an increasingly pronounced institutional distancing from Béla Károlyi. Their relationship, once essential to her Olympic success, was replaced by an official silence, while Nadia's public image and personal life were carefully controlled by the Romanian authorities until her departure from the country in 1989.

The study underscores how sporting glory becomes fragile under authoritarian rule and how mentor–disciple bonds are strained by political control and suspicion. Nadia Comăneci's post-Montreal trajectory, together with her evolving relationship with Béla Károlyi, reveals how a gymnast celebrated as a 'Hero of Socialist Labor' could simultaneously be confined by her own state. The analysis highlights the ideological and institutional forces through which the communist regime shaped the fate of one of the world's most remarkable athletes.

**Mots-Clés:** Nadia Comăneci, the communist regime, Béla Károlyi, political control

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