

THE FORMATION OF THE FIRST SPORTS SOCIETIES IN UZBEKISTAN AND THEIR ROLE IN SOCIO-POLITICAL LIFE (19TH–20TH CENTURIES)

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Abstract

The article examines the formation of the first sports societies in Turkestan at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries and their role in socio-political life. During this period, at the initiative of the intelligentsia, sports clubs and societies began to emerge in cities such as Tashkent, Samarkand, and Andijan. Cycling, tennis, weightlifting, wrestling, and football gained popularity among the local population. The establishment of the Tashkent Amateur Cycling Society in 1894, followed by the creation of tennis courts, gymnastics, and athletics groups, marked significant steps in the development of sports. Sports societies not only promoted physical culture but also played a crucial role in fostering national identity, social integration, and educational activities. The achievements of local wrestlers, such as Ahmad Polvon, in international competitions bolstered national pride. The article analyzes the influence of European culture, foreign experiences, and socio-political changes through the lens of sports. This study is a valuable resource for researchers exploring the history of sports, social transformations, and national movements.

Keywords: Turkestan, cycling, wrestling, tennis, socio-political life, national identity, physical culture.

Introduction

Nowadays, sport is not only an essential element of physical education and a healthy lifestyle but also occupies a significant place in the socio-political life of society. Through sport, interethnic friendship is strengthened, patriotic feelings among the younger generation are enhanced, and the upbringing of a healthy and well-rounded generation is achieved. In the Republic of Uzbekistan, the development of sport has been identified as one of the priority directions of state policy. From this point of view, studying the early formation of sport in the country, the emergence of the first sports societies, and their impact on the socio-political environment remains of contemporary relevance. Indeed, understanding the past plays an important role in building the future.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the emergence and development of modern sport in the Turkestan region was a unique historical process. The

sports societies that were established during this period not only laid the foundation for the popularization of sport but also played a crucial role in the intellectuals' aspirations for national identity, enlightenment, and societal renewal. Through the activities of these societies, a spirit of communication and solidarity was fostered among various social groups, and national sports traditions began to harmonize with modern types of sport. Therefore, studying the history of sport in this period allows us to grasp the distinctive features of past developments in sport and draw valuable lessons for improving current sports policies and preserving and advancing national sports traditions. Furthermore, examining the role of the early sports societies in the socio-political life of Uzbekistan helps to shed light on the interactions among different strata of society during that era, the role of national intellectuals, cultural transformations, and the mutual influence between sport and political trends. This, in turn, is essential for gaining a deeper understanding of the socio-political history of the country, strengthening national identity, and passing down a rich historical legacy to future generations.

THE DEGREE OF PROBLEM INVESTIGATION

Several studies have been conducted on the topic of the formation of the first sports societies in Uzbekistan and their role in socio-political life (19th–20th centuries), most of which have approached the subject from a general historical and pedagogical perspective. The works of A.K. Akramov and F. Khojayeov provide important factual information regarding the emergence of early sports societies, their organizational structures, and their place in social life. L.A. Djalilova's educational manual addresses the topic from a theoretical and methodological standpoint, while R.A. Kasimova's book *"Razvitie massovogo fizkulturnogo dvizheniya v Uzbekistane"* highlights the significance of these societies in the formation of the mass physical culture movement. However, these sources tend to offer generalized overviews and do not give sufficient attention to a detailed analysis of the specific socio-political impact of these societies.

In addition, the article by R. Abdumalikov and J.E. Eshnazarov creates a contextual framework for understanding the transition of national sports traditions into modern forms. M.S. Akhmatov's research briefly touches on the historical development, while the works of N.M. Donomarev and J. Eshnazarov also include information relevant to the period under study, albeit based on a generalist approach. The writings of B. Kuhn and B.R. Goloshchapov provide limited information about the history of sport in Central Asia but do not extensively explore the specific characteristics of Uzbekistan. Therefore, to achieve new scientific insights, it is necessary to broaden the scope of archival sources, apply modern analytical methods, and thoroughly examine the various aspects of socio-political influence.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed historical-comparative, historical-analytical, and statistical methods. The historical-comparative method enabled the comparison of the establishment and development of the first sports societies with the concurrent socio-political processes of the time. The historical-analytical method facilitated the critical examination of sources, the identification of facts, and the analysis of their interrelationships. The statistical method was used to evaluate

numerical data, such as the number of members in sports societies and statistics on competitions held, to determine general trends. Combining these methods made it possible to examine the research topic comprehensively and draw well-grounded conclusions.

RESULTS AND THEIR DISCUSSION

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the foundations were laid for the introduction and development of modern sports in the Turkestan region. Initiatives by the local intelligentsia led to the establishment of sports clubs and societies in the cities of the region. In the early sports sections, military officers, civil servants, and intellectuals were the primary participants. The Turkestani intellectuals who had received secular education abroad were among the progressive and enlightened figures of their time. Through acquaintance with the experiences of foreign countries and their educational activities, they came to understand the significant importance of physical education in the holistic development of the human being. During this period, the gradual introduction of European culture, which was new to the local population, and the interaction between different cultures stimulated a notable development of sports in various parts of Turkestan.

In particular, growing interest in cycling led to the establishment of the “Tashkent Amateur Cyclists' Society” (TACS) in 1894. The society developed its charter and a procedure for the payment of membership fees. On September 18, 1894, the first cycling competition was held at a temporary velodrome in the city park. In 1895, a cycling circle was founded in the city of Samarkand, and competitions began to be organized. Their first race was held on July 4, 1895, at a military training ground. Proceeds from ticketed seats for spectators were donated to the Samarkand orphanage [1, p. 15].

On April 16, 1896, during a meeting of the Tashkent Amateur Cyclists' Society (TACS), the issue of constructing a velodrome in Tashkent was discussed and positively resolved. The velodrome was completed in July of the same year and opened for use on August 4. Four Uzbek cyclists participated in the first races held at the new velodrome [2, p. 17].

Between 1894 and 1912, professional athletes from Russia actively took part in various cycling competitions organized under the initiative of TACS. During these years, famous professional cyclists visited Tashkent with demonstrative performances titled “Flying on the Air Track,” “The Devil’s Race,” and “Fire on a Bicycle.” Although the main activities of the society during this period were aimed at organizing entertainment events for local aristocrats, wealthy merchants, and high-ranking military officers, it must be emphasized that the society played an important and progressive role in the development of cycling in the region [3, p. 22].

By the end of the 19th century, the local population's interest in wrestling and weightlifting had increased significantly. In 1895, the famous German strongman Rippel visited Tashkent and demonstrated his strength and skills in a circus arena. Weighing eight and a half pounds (approximately 133 kg), he amazed spectators by lifting an eight-pound (approximately 131 kg) iron weight with both hands and a sixteen-pound (approximately 262 kg) iron weight on his shoulders. During this same period, Ahmad Polvon, who originated from the Beshyoghoch district of Tashkent, was recognized as one of the strongest wrestlers in Central Asia. On one occasion, Ahmad Polvon wrestled Rippel and defeated him in a short amount of time. In 1911,

Ahmad Polvon achieved victory over the German champion Giber in a classical wrestling competition held under French rules. Such powerful and skilled wrestlers were found throughout nearly all regions of Uzbekistan [4, p. 21].

In 1903, the first tennis court appeared in the city of Tashkent. Its structure was very simple and lacked any barriers. Across the city, only one individual, likely of Czech nationality—a schoolteacher named Van Drachek—possessed a few tennis balls and rackets. Under his leadership, students independently wove a tennis net. In 1909, the first tennis competitions began to be held in Tashkent. One of the first tennis players in our country was Polina Karfung. Later, tennis began to gain popularity in cities such as Andijan, Bukhara, Kokand, and Fergana. In the 1930s, specialists from Moscow significantly contributed to the development of tennis in Uzbekistan [5, p. 27].

In 1904, the "Tashkent Society of Gymnastics and Physical Exercise Enthusiasts" was established, and in 1906, the "Sokol" ("Falcon") athletics group began its activities. It was precisely from 1906 that football began to take shape as an officially recognized sport in Central Asia [5, p. 28].

In 1908, a professional wrestling championship was held in Turkestan. This championship featured world-renowned wrestlers, including Russians Ivan Poddubny and Ivan Zaikin. The competitions were held in three types of wrestling: Uzbek wrestling, Russian belt wrestling, and French wrestling. In 1909, notable wrestlers such as Matyushenko and Sokolov from Russia, Carlos from Spain, Strobans from France, Chuyanidze from the Caucasus, and Paul Ban from Germany participated in these tournaments. In 1910, at the initiative of Russian Ivan Lebedev, French wrestling competitions were organized, in which France's champion Chevalier and Turkey's champion Qaraahmad also participated. They were challenged by local wrestlers such as Ahmad, Azim Khoja, Haydar Ali, Abdurahmon Vohitov, and Toji Aglayev [6, pp. 17–18].

In 1909, an athletics society was established in Tashkent. One of its founders, Nikolay Gorizdro, was known as a record-holder in weightlifting. In 1910, a hunters' society was founded in Samarkand, and in Andijan, a sports society named "Diskobol" was established. That same year, amateur sports circles for running, jumping, and throwing in athletics disciplines began operating in the cities of Tashkent and Fergana. From 1911 onward, various sports competitions and intercity football matches were regularly organized in cities such as Fergana, Tashkent, Samarkand, Andijan, Kokand, and others [7].

In 1911, the "Gymnastics-Fencing School" was opened in Tashkent. This institution began training instructors in fencing and gymnastics using sports apparatuses. In 1912, the first course in gymnastics and military drill aimed at preparing physical education teachers for educational institutions was established. As a result of major qualifying competitions held at this school in 1912, the best athletes from the Turkestan region were selected to join the Russian Empire's national team for the Fifth Olympic Games held in Stockholm [8].

In 1912, the first football teams were established in the cities of Kokand and Fergana. In the following years, football teams were also formed in other cities of Turkestan, and intercity football matches began to be held among teams from Tashkent, Fergana, Samarkand, Andijan, and Kokand [9].

In 1913, the largest sports society in the Turkestan region – the “Tashkent Amateur Athletes' Society” – was established. The society included departments for sports such as football, athletics, and tennis. In 1915–1916, the first scout groups (from the English word *scout-pathfinder*) in the Turkestan region were founded at the Tashkent Gymnasium. These scouts engaged in military drill training, organized various active games, and excursions. Among the promoters of different sports games were also Russian students who came to Tashkent, Fergana, and other cities of the Turkestan region during the summer holidays. They were also the organizers of competitions in cycling, football, athletics, and other types of sports [10].

Due to the increasing popularity of sports, a lack of qualified coaches for training athletes began to be felt. Therefore, in 1915, the first course for training gymnastics instructors was organized in the city of Tashkent.

In 1916, the "Sport Mobilization" (*Sport safarbarligi*) organization was established. Students from gymnasiums, seminaries, real schools, and vocational schools were mobilized to this organization for one month. A physical education program intended for military units was applied during these sessions. The main objective of the organization was to physically and militarily train the youth and ensure their assessment [16].

In 1918, sports clubs were organized at the People's University of Central Asia. These clubs provided training in swimming, athletics, and gymnastics, and a football team was also established. During this period, gymnastics societies such as "Sokol" and "Sever" were also active [11].

In 1920, a solarium and a 15-meter-long swimming pool were built in Tashkent with the personal funds of physician Moisey Ilyich Slonim (1875–1945) for therapeutic purposes. Uzbekistan's first swimming school, consisting of 800 students, was also founded at this location [12].

In 1927, the construction of the first modern 50-meter swimming pool near Tashkent became a significant event in the sporting life of Uzbekistan. That same year, an intercity competition was held at this pool with swimmers from the city of Samara [15].

In the 1920s, Uzbekistan hosted the first major complex competitions of modern sports – the Central Asian Olympics and the All-Uzbekistan Spartakiads. In 1920, 15 sports organizations were operating in Tashkent, while by 1923, more than 70 various sports organizations had been established across Uzbekistan, including 24 sports clubs, 17 physical education circles, 14 scout groups, and 15 sports departments [14].

Conclusions

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the first sprouts of modern sport emerged in the Turkestan region. The early sports societies, established through the enthusiasm of the local intelligentsia, not only contributed to the physical well-being of the population but also opened a new chapter in the socio-cultural life of the region. The early sounds of cycling competitions, the contests on wrestling fields, the white balls bouncing on tennis courts, and the thrilling matches on football grounds became increasingly popular, with regular competitions being organized. These sporting events, with their unique appeal, brought together representatives of various social strata on a common field, serving as a significant

platform that united them in a spirit of solidarity and left a lasting mark on the region's socio-cultural landscape.

The activities of the first sports societies were not limited to physical exercises and competitions; they were also closely intertwined with the complex socio-political context of the time. The enlightenment ideas of national intellectuals, aimed at awakening the people and fostering national self-awareness, found a vivid expression in the work of these societies. Through sporting events, noble goals such as promoting a healthy lifestyle and raising a physically and morally mature young generation were pursued. As a result, the early sports societies became one of the progressive and forward-thinking forces of their era.

The public competitions and various sporting events regularly organized by these societies played an important role in strengthening ties of cooperation and solidarity among different ethnic groups and social strata within the society of that time. This activity was not only directed at improving the population's physical health, but also contributed significantly to social integration and the development of intercultural cooperation. The growing popularity of sports laid the groundwork for the formation of new social connections among the local population and led to positive transformations in societal relations.

Today, the rapid development of sports in Uzbekistan and its growing influence on social life are directly linked to the strong foundations laid at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The exemplary work of those early sports societies provided a solid basis for the remarkable achievements of modern Uzbekistan's sports on the international stage. The increasing importance of sport in national life demonstrates that today's success is the worthy outcome of simple but meaningful initiatives from the past.

A thorough study of the exemplary activities of past sports societies not only allows us to approach the national sports history with deep respect but also offers valuable lessons for the future. This rich experience serves as an important and priceless resource for instilling a genuine love for sports in future generations, promoting healthy lifestyles, and further developing national sports traditions. The current achievements of independent Uzbekistan in the field of sports vividly reflect the continuous and strong connection between the past and the future.

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