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Rapidism, the Sports Phenomenon **Pompiliu-Nicolae Constantin (2020)**

Rapidismul: istoria unui fenomen sportive. Pro Universitaria
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One of the most comprehensive books about Romanian football history is *Rapidism. The History of a Sports Phenomenon* was published in the spring of 2021. It mainly focuses on the phenomenon of rapidism through the ages. Still, the detailed historical and social context also provides us with a good outline of Romanian football and its political relationship. Pompiliu-Nicolae Constantin, the author of the book, is a historian, journalist, and professor at the National University of Physical Education and Sports in Bucharest.

The strength of the book lies in the fact that it is based on thorough research, processing numerous press and archival documents, and also dozens of interviews with sportsmen, managers, and supporters, which provide a narrative history of the topic. In these stories, the author encounters contradictions and gaps, but with the help of the other material studied, he manages to create a comprehensive, analytical overview, which he presents to the reader with due criticism, but not in an offensive way towards the subject of the text. Over 350 pages, the author offers the reader a very informative and story-filled reading experience. Even without any prior knowledge of the topic, the reader will find this book easy to follow, which has a dual audience: lay people like me, but who are very interested in the social context, and enthusiastic supporters and people who are (professionally) interested in the sport.

The author has attempted to answer four specific questions, which he presents in the introduction of the book. The research focuses on the development and identity of the supporter base, one of the questions being: is rapidism just a sporting phenomenon or is it also a social movement? Furthermore, if it is an anti-regime 'movement' (before 1989 during communism), to what extent did political power succeed in intervening, and how did this affect the supporters? It also examines the question if rapidism can be considered an urban phenomenon, what rapidism means after 1989, and how much has it changed in the last three decades of post-communism. The book is structured into eight chapters, in which the author presents the Rapid Club's sometimes outstanding performances and sometimes periods of struggle for survival, in chronological order, dividing the chapters into historical periods. FC Rapid București is a Romanian football club established a century ago by the rail workers union.

The first chapter gives a general introduction to Romanian football, its appearance, development, and importance in Romanian society. By the 19th century, football had become a popular leisure activity in the West, mostly among the elite. Students studying in the West, after returning home, spread this fashionable activity to present-day Romanian areas, especially in Transylvania, which was then part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The spread of foot-

ball led to the appearance of new communities, with the first football clubs and teams being established in Romania in the early 20th century. Most of the clubs of the time were founded by foreigners, but with the outbreak of the First World War they left the country, causing a decline in the quality of football and an uncertain period had begun. The post-war period was characterized by confusion: no tools, no good professionals, no resources, but enthusiasm. After the unification in 1918, the sporting scene was also united, and the conflict between the capital and Transylvania was reflected in football. The violence and rivalry that characterized the period of the war were further symbolically expressed in football, where the human body and its efforts are spectacularly presented to the spectator. There were different types of fans at that time, some who were aware of the rules and the way the game was played, but mostly the opposite was common among those who were interested. The introduction of gymnastics education in schools brought about a change in the way sport is perceived and in society's attitudes. With the spread of a new mentality, caused by the gradual integration of football into everyday life, it is no longer seen as a silly game of running around. Football becomes a symbol of political and economic life, a symbol of competition between nations. In the period between the two world wars, footballers became as much an idol as actors, and football became a common leisure activity, similar to theatre and cinema. The movement of the footballers, the control over their bodies, and the dynamism of the game all attracted people, making them inspirational idols for all ages, and entrepreneurs soon started to see it as an opportunity to make a profit. The fans have found a medium to express their identity because loyalty to a team is also a reflection of their political, economic, and social situation. Football's popularity at the time was reflected in the numbers: while in 1933 there were 380 registered clubs, by 1944 there were 456.

In the second chapter, the author presents the period between the two world wars because he considers that to understand the reasons behind the formation of Rapid, the reader needs to know about the social, economic, cultural, and political situation in Romania from these years. Without this knowledge, it is impossible to understand the phenomenon of rapids that later developed; therefore, the author focuses on the historical context in the next chapters too. The Giulești railway team was formed after the First World War in 1923, under the name CFR București, but in 1937, the team was renamed Rapid. By then, the team was no longer made up primarily of railway workers, but of professional players, with whom they became one of the most important football teams in the country, alongside Venus and Ripensia – according to the author, this is why they decided to choose a name that represents their style of play and their ambition to succeed, even though they feared that this could lead to the team losing its railway identity. The book also tells us that they played in purple uniforms for the first twelve years until they got their cherry red and white uniforms from Vienna. However, because of the propaganda of permanence and the long past, the purple uniforms have faded from the fans' memories, and there is even a version that the red uniforms were first sewn from the curtains of trains. The core of the supporters were railwaymen and workers from the Giulești district, but there were also many fans from Transylvania, where the football players were partly from. The team had been characterized by financial instability, especially in the early years, between the two world wars, but this was also true for most other teams in Romania at the time. Most of the players in Rapid had a main job, and only a few professional footballers could be paid,

who were joining the team in the late 1930s. To survive, they organized many friendly matches, sometimes several a week, in different parts of the country, where the main aim was to entertain the spectators, the desire for that spectacularism also determined their playing styles. At first, the team had a problem with a lack of collective spirit and cohesion, so in the 1930s for the early development of players, they started a junior team, and they began to work with professional trainers from Hungary and Austria. They also bought professional footballers, including Gyula Barátky, who became one of the idols of the era. With the new players, the team had also been restructured, so it is no surprise that they changed their name as it was no longer a team only of workers from Giulești.

In the period between the two world wars, the team achieved success after success and managed to survive World War II. Between 1934 and 1942, they won the Romanian Cup seven times but failed to win the championship, even if they were closer to it. The team also succeeded abroad, in 1940 they were allowed to play for the Central European Cup for the second time, this time going straight to the final, which they were to play against the Hungarian Ferencváros, but due to the outbreak of World War II, this did not happen. For the public at the time, this was a very important achievement, as they were the first team in Romanian football history to reach the finals of international competition. After the outbreak of World War II, a difficult period began, several teams disappeared and Rapid had financial difficulties, but they continued their activities. During the war, football proved to be a therapeutic activity for all those who played, watched, or talked about it. However, the war escalated international tensions and nationalist sentiment. according to memories, Rapid kept its multicultural character, speaking in different languages, like Romanian, Hungarian, German, and French, which shows how ethnically and religiously diverse was the team.

The next three chapters cover the period of state socialism. This is the period in which the phenomenon of rapidism intensified and acquired its essential dissent-like particular identity, as a kind of double reaction to state socialism and the dominant character of the new political system. According to the author, the communist regime took away the opportunity for Rapid to become the best team in the country's history, but if it had turned out differently, the phenomenon of rapidism could not have been developed. For the regime, the sport was of special importance for ideological education and the desired international success. Based on the literature used by the author, the difference between the West and the East in terms of sport is that while in the West sport is for *anyone*, in the East it is for *everybody*. So the difference is between free choice and obligation, for the socialist bloc, the obligation was propagated as a tool for preserving health, but in fact, it was used for ideological education. As Rapid was identified as a railway team, in the early years the communists tried to use it as a tool to increase the popularity of the regime. The regime changed the names of the teams, Rapid was renamed first to CFR București and then Locomotiva București, as were the other railway teams in the country, which better reflected the ideological vision of the political power. Rapidism was also defined by the fact that the communist regime established two teams, Dinamo and Steaua, as they are known today, who were allowed to start in the first division straight away, while other teams of the time were eliminated one after the other because of the instability. This destroyed the idea of equality, and an increasing number of frustrated and disappointed workers in a difficult socio-political situation joined Rapid's supporters. Thus, even though the supporters were

essentially from the working class, rapidism became an anti-regime movement, a choice against the system, rapidism gave people hope, it promoted diversity and freedom. This phenomenon was largely concentrated in the urban areas, where these railway and industrial workers lived in large numbers, as a result of forced urbanization. In the quarters–flats neighborhoods–football was played from dawn to dusk, children taking their love and commitment to the team from their fathers. During this time the team played sometimes in the first and sometimes in the second division, there were years of success and years of weakness, but the supporters did not leave the team, as the successes achieved so far kept their enthusiasm alive during the difficult times, but in 1967 they finally managed to win the title of the championship.

The author also occasionally mentions the national and international successes of the club's other sports disciplines, which was compensation for football supporters, when the football team did not perform well. For Rapid's supporters, spectacular playing was very important, which was one of the team's characteristics at the time. The supporters created symbols and rituals, often with ironic and anti-establishment chants, caricatures, and poems to covertly express their feelings. They also had informal leaders who organized the community. Under the communist regime of Ceaușescu, the supporters' base began to function like a clan, where they solved their problems within the community, isolated from the rest of society, using the contact networks provided by the community, for example, if someone needed a hairdresser or a doctor, they would go to a Rapid supporter. These networks extended all over the country, as they had the opportunity to get to know each other during the matches. This phenomenon is illustrated by a quote from one of the author's interviewees. "*We trusted each other because we saw each other match after match and it was natural that we would help each other. Rapid's supporters came from all backgrounds and that was an advantage.*" (p. 207). The stadium is an important space where supporters can feel relatively free, where they can freely choose who to cheer for, and where they can release pent-up tension and put aside everyday difficulties.

The seventh chapter describes the losses suffered in the revolution, and the last two chapters focus on the events of the post-communist period and the eternal problems of rapidism. In the street riots of 1989, several players from the football team and the club lost their lives. Despite the tragic losses, the revolution gave supporters grounds for optimism, as the team would have the possibility to achieve success in a free market environment, independent of a totalitarian system. Rapid became a brand in free market conditions, and because of its market potential, the team was quickly founded by a businessman, George Copos, who took over the financing of the team. He is one of the autochthonous elites who quickly became rich and politically influential after the regime change. But with the transition to capitalism, profit orientation has become the primary concern, and even in this "free market" system, their survival is not guaranteed. The 2008 global economic crisis also hit Rapid's top management, and from then, the team entered into a period of uncertainty, accumulating debts of €50 million by 2013, before going into liquidation in 2015. They were reorganized later in that year, but straight back into the fifth division, they only returned to the first division in 2021. However, the team flourished after the revolution until 2008, when it seemed that they finally managed to break out. They won the championship twice, the Romanian Cup four times, and in 2006, they achieved one of their biggest international successes since the Second World War in the UEFA Cup. Now they still play again in the Romanian top league.

After the revolution, the field of football cheering also expanded, and liberated. After that, anyone is free to sing about anything, and slogans and banners are not restricted anymore. This, in turn, is a breeding ground for racism, which the author also discusses in the last chapter. The supporters identify symbolic heroes in the footballers, whereas previously the only heroes were Ceaușescu and his wife. The footballers become even more idolized public figures, role models for children, whose every move is carefully analyzed. There is also a generational change among fans, who have less time to go to matches, many of them cheer from their armchairs, in front of the TV, and the author also mentions the problem of the massive emigration which has also affected the active supporters. Community organization is also changing, with the internet taking the place of supporters' magazines, which has advantages but also disadvantages, as the possibility of non-physical communication encourages people, leaving room for insults. New ways to show support and sympathy for the team, such as graffiti, rap songs, and the use of the preferred team colors in house painting have become very common. Ultras or football hooligans first emerged among Rapid supporters in the country. They tend to parade with offensive banners and get into conflicts with rival supporters. Another common cause of conflict is that rival supporters often call Rapid supporters with racist insults. There have been several conflicts where, for example, supporters of two historically rival teams, Dinamo and Steaua, called Rapid supporters Romas, although they say this is not directed towards the Roma minority but is a way of ridiculing Rapid supporters. This is based on the fact that the working-class neighborhood of Giulești has a high proportion of Roma ethnicity, who are identified mockingly with Rapid supporters by rivals. This was also present under the communist regime, but then racism was considered a non-existent problem, which meant that minorities could be insulted without any sanction. The author also devotes a few pages to the situation of female players and supporters, how football is becoming more popular among women, and how Rapid even has a female ultras, the Granata Girls.

After reading this informative and really interesting book, we can say for sure that it is a comprehensive, thorough research work that exhaustively describes the rise and fall periods of Rapid, the development and evolution of the rooting phenomenon, and the different historical periods whose social, economic, political and cultural characteristics have had a significant influence on the phenomenon and the team. The book also has the advantage that, although rapidism is primarily football-related, it also covers the other activities of the sports club and its successes, as well as the problem of racism and the feminist aspects of the phenomenon, although the author discusses the last two briefly.

Also, I would have read more about the evolution of the minority issue within the team and the phenomenon of rapidism over the years. The book is recommended not only for fans and football followers or professionals who deal with the topic but also for those who want to better understand the reasons behind the phenomena, as well as for lay people and skeptics who may find a new perspective by reading the book.