



SPORMETRE

The Journal of Physical Education and Sport Sciences
Beden Eğitimi ve Spor Bilimleri Dergisi



DOI: 10.33689/Spormetre.1380424

Geliş Tarihi (Received): 24.10.2023

Kabul Tarihi (Accepted): 22.11.2023

Online Yayın Tarihi (Published): 30.11.2023

AN ATHLETIC NATION: AN EXPLORATION OF MUSTAFA KEMAL ATATÜRK'S SPORTS VISION ON THE CENTENNIAL OF THE TURKISH REPUBLIC

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Abstract: This research extensively examines Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's profound connection with sports in Türkiye. Commencing with Atatürk's personal interest in sports, this investigation delves into how sports became integrated into the vision of the Republic of Türkiye from various perspectives. The study highlights the place of sports within the broader context of the Turkish Revolution and underscores its critical importance in societal transformation. Through this work, Atatürk's perspective on the fundamental principles of sports is thoroughly elucidated and linked to national education and cultural values. As a result of this research, Atatürk's relationships with individual athletes and sports clubs are revealed, shedding light on his personal dedication to and profound commitment to the sector. Additionally, the establishment of sports organizations, state support in the early years of the Republic, and the significance of the Physical Education Law in Atatürk's institutional support and vision in this field are summarized within the scope of the study.

Key Words: Atatürk, Physical Education and Sports, Republic of Türkiye

ATLETİK BİR ULUS: CUMHURİYETİN 100. YILINDA MUSTAFA KEMAL ATATÜRK'ÜN SPOR VİZYONUNUN İNCELENMESİ

Öz: Bu araştırma, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk'ün Türkiye'deki sporla olan derin bağımlıca ele almaktadır. Atatürk'ün spora olan kişisel ilgisiyle başlayan bu inceleme, sporun Türkiye Cumhuriyeti vizyonuna nasıl entegre olduğunu çok yönlü bir şekilde irdelemektedir. Sporun, geniş kapsamlı Türk Devrimi içerisindeki yeri ve toplumsal dönüşümdeki kritik önemi vurgulanmaktadır. Bu çalışma ile Atatürk'ün gözünden sporun temel ilkeleri derinlemesine açıklanmakta ve bunu ulusal eğitim ve kültürel değerlerle ilişkilendirmektedir. Araştırma neticesinde Atatürk'ün bireysel sporcular ve spor kulüpleriyle olan ilişkisi, spora olan kişisel bağlılığı ve sektöre olan derin taahhüdü ortaya koyulmaktadır. Ayrıca spor organizasyonlarının kuruluşu, Cumhuriyet'in ilk dönemlerindeki devlet desteği ve Beden Eğitimi Kanunu ile Atatürk'ün bu alandaki kurumsal destek ve vizyonu araştırma kapsamında özetlenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Atatürk, Beden Eğitimi ve Spor, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti

INTRODUCTION

In the context of mass culture, it is evident that sports have had a profound impact on Turkish society, with a deep-rooted historical presence. Throughout known history, Turks have placed significant importance on physical education and sporting activities, both as a necessity in their struggles against adversaries and nature. These sporting activities have been sustained as a social, economic, military, and political phenomenon in every aspect of Turkish cultural life, from assemblies where administrative decisions are made to marriage and birth ceremonies (Kafesoğlu, 1997). Over time, these sporting activities, shaped by climate and geography, evolved and progressed across all Turkish states, spanning from the Great Hun Empire to the Ottoman Empire. Turks have engaged in various sporting activities such as hunting, equestrianism, archery, swordsmanship, marksmanship, wrestling, foot races,

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jumping, stone-throwing, mace and club usage, javelin throwing, skiing, and a game called matrak, aligning them with their way of life (Güven, 1999). However, during the latter half of the 19th century, when significant advancements and professionalization in sports were taking place globally, the Ottoman Empire, burdened by its military, economic, political, and social difficulties, was unable to sufficiently invest in physical education and sports activities. Consequently, sporting activities within Turkish territories lagged behind the contemporary world (Ünver, 2004).

The comprehensive and effective handling of contemporary advancements in sports in Turkish territories by both the nation and the government became possible during the Republic era. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who led the Turkish nation to independence through the National Liberation Movement, initiated a multifaceted revolution encompassing economic, political, cultural, and social activities. Among these, sports held a significant place (Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri, 1997, p. 259-260). Despite some positive developments through reforms in the 19th century, the Turkish nation struggled to achieve the expected modernization required to align with contemporary societies. Atatürk's life, which extended from 1881 to 1938, transpired amidst the historical transition from a declining Ottoman Empire to the establishment of a National Republic State regime. Throughout this process, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk can be seen at various times as a young officer striving to make a difference, as an influencer of those higher up, as a commander who fought on various fronts of an empire, and as a confident architect of a completely new concept of the state, laying its foundations as a statesman (Berkes, 1993).

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is a personality that needs to be presented in a scientific manner, devoid of sentimentality, and in all its facets. This is because presenting Atatürk in such a manner will facilitate understanding him and lay the foundations for progress for future generations. Understanding Atatürk equates to comprehending the founding philosophy of the Republic of Türkiye and its current state. It is appropriate to recall his statements at this point (Kocatürk, 1999):

“To see me does not mean seeing my face. If you understand my thoughts, if you understand my feelings, this is enough. There are two Mustafa Kemals: One is me, the flesh and bone, temporary Mustafa Kemal... The second Mustafa Kemal, I cannot express him with the word 'I.' He is not me, but 'we.' He is a community of intellectuals and warriors who strive for new ideas, new life, and a great ideal in every corner of the country. I represent their dreams. My endeavors are to satisfy what they long for. That Mustafa Kemal is you, all of you. It is the one who is not temporary but must live and succeed.”

Atatürk's Personal Interest in Sports

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk displayed an active and physically inclined disposition during his childhood years (Belli, 2005). His interest in sports began to grow when he received support from Gymnastics Instructor Lieutenant Habib Bey at the Selanik Military Junior High School. During this time, he even showed a keen interest in attending local wrestling matches, horse races, and javelin games. His success in “Gymnastics” classes at the Manastır Military High School, as well as in “Training” and “Drill” classes at the Istanbul Military Academy and Turkish War Academy (Sönmez, 2004), was a testament to the physical education and proficiency he acquired through his education and military career, particularly in marksmanship and horsemanship (Tuncel, 2003).

Atatürk remained intertwined with various sports throughout his life. For instance, the game of billiards, which he first encountered in Manastır, became a regular part of his daily life during his presidency. While in Istanbul, he played billiards with friends such as Tevfik Rüştü Aras, Salih Bozok, İsmet İnönü, and Nuri Conker, both at the Florya Seaside Mansion and later at the Çankaya Presidential Mansion in Ankara (Gürsoy, 2011). Additionally, he developed a habit of playing billiards on his own at times (Atay, 1998). Atatürk also enjoyed long walks, and during the summer months in Istanbul, he would swim and engage in rowing exercises at Florya, setting an example for his athletic personality. Hence, it is known that Atatürk remained fit, agile, and fast until the signs of the illness that eventually led to his separation from the nation became apparent (Atatürk'ten Hatıralar, 2010).

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Sports in the Context of the Turkish Revolution

As one of its fundamental goals, the Republic of Türkiye aimed to elevate Turkish culture to the level of contemporary civilization, and this extended to the realm of sports as well. In this context, Atatürk emphasized the importance of the Turkish nation comprehending the quality and value of sports, showing genuine affection for it, and considering it a national duty to make progress in the field. Atatürk believed that achieving this goal required shaping and organizing the physical activities and movements that people engage in as part of their daily lives according to scientific methods and principles, a task entrusted to athletes and sports educators. According to Atatürk, the success achieved in sports would be not only an indicator of the accomplishments of athletes, clubs, or the supporting state but fundamentally a reflection of the success of the entire nation (Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri, 1997, p. 260-262).

Atatürk viewed sports as one of the factors that indicated a nation's level of development, civilizational capability, and the height of the civilization it had built (Süslü, 1986). In this regard, he expressed his belief on various occasions that Turkish sports would soon attain the place it deserved. To achieve this, he highlighted that sporting activities needed to be integrated with health, social, and civilizational elements and called for relevant authorities to take necessary measures for their implementation (Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri, 1997, p. 262).

Considering youth and sports as complementary concepts, Atatürk entrusted the young Republic of Türkiye, which he believed should be robust, strong, and healthy, to the Turkish youth, following the aphorism:

“A sound mind in a sound body (Kocatürk, 1999, p. 329).”

In terms of raising the youth responsible for the independence and future of the Turkish nation, Atatürk emphasized the importance of physical education, stating:

“It is a clear indication of our main policy to raise a virtuous, strong generation whose capabilities are enhanced and improved both in intellectual and physical training, based on positive sciences, loving fine arts, and having succeeded in physical education (Atatürkçülük, 1984, p. 296).”

Atatürk described sports in his distinctive style by saying:

“I will tell you openly and firmly that, to succeed in sports, it is more important for the entire nation to understand the essence

and value of sports, to show heartfelt affection for it, and to consider it a national duty than to receive any kind of assistance (Kocatürk, 1999, p. 327)."

Additionally, he attempted to define sports in his own unique way through the following anecdote:

"During the Gallipoli War, a Turkish soldier, who was on a reconnaissance mission, brought a captured British soldier to me, holding him by the throat. I first asked the enemy soldier why he had come here from his homeland. He replied, 'For sports.' Then I asked how they found our soldiers. He answered, 'The captured soldier doesn't know anything about sports.' Upon hearing this response, I said, 'If they ask me what sports are, I will say: Sports is the ability, both materially and spiritually, to catch those who threaten the homeland and the nation and bring them before the servants of the homeland and the nation (San, 1981, p. 35)."

Furthermore, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk stressed the significance of sports, stating:

"In the world, the realm of sports is of great importance. It is even more important for us because it is a matter of race, a matter of improving and developing the race, and, to a certain extent, a matter of civilization (Kocatürk, 1999, p. 327)."

Atatürk believed in the importance of physical education and sports for the nation and civilization, and he endeavored to promote a healthy and robust society through sports activities for people of all ages and genders.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Sports from a Societal Perspective

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk envisioned giving sports a societal function with the idea:

"In the Turkish social structure, those responsible for organizing sports activities should not aim to win a competition but should prioritize providing physical education for all Turks of all ages. Our ancestors did not speak in vain when they said, 'A sound mind in a sound body (Atatürkçülük, 1984, p. 343)."

He aimed to make sports an integral part of Turkish society, thus fostering a healthy, strong, dynamic, productive, and morally upright population. Atatürk articulated his fundamental goal regarding sports as follows:

"The main purpose is to provide physical education for all Turks of all ages (Kocatürk, 1999, p. 329)."

Underscoring the idea that sports should encompass the entire nation. Accordingly, in 1932, Atatürk established the principles of the organization in People's Houses (Halkevleri), stating:

"Sports and physical activities are an indispensable and crucial part of youth education. Therefore, love and interest in sports and physical activities should be aroused in Turkish youth and

the Turkish people, and these should be turned into a national activity, a mass movement (Afyon, 1997, p. 23)."

During a period when sports policies worldwide either viewed sports as a propaganda tool, advertising medium, or a means of promoting public health, Atatürk stressed the importance of prioritizing the latter, emphasizing a healthy lifestyle through sports. He said:

"We have not yet reached the European level. In sports, we must have a single and specific goal. We will either make sports for propaganda purposes, or we will do it to promote our physical development (Atatürkçülük, 1984, p. 345)."

Atatürk's choice was to prioritize the principle of sports for a healthy life as the primary goal of Türkiye's sports policy. Sports are a way of life for the Turks and have played a significant role in Turkish society and nation-building. It is as influential in Turkish life as women, weapons, and horses. For this reason, sports have permeated all aspects of Turkish life, even finding a place in wedding ceremonies. According to Altınok (1992), Atatürk had the following goals with regards to sports:

- *To create a modern Turkish society where everyone, from children to the elderly, engages in sports throughout their lives in a scientifically oriented environment for physical and mental health.*
- *To raise a virtuous Turkish generation in physical education, just as in intellectual education, who would bear the responsibility for Turkish independence and its regime, the Republic.*
- *To maintain the world championship with honor, worthy of the Turkish identity and Turkishness in sports.*
- *To work systematically and scientifically for success.*
- *To promote and preserve Turkish sports culture.*
- *To maintain our existence as Turks at the most civilized level in sports as in all other fields (Altınok, 1992, p. 25).*

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Basic Principles of Sports

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk emphasized the principles of sports as they relate to life, ideals, courage, determination, and morality. He stated:

"Dear youth, life is nothing but a struggle. Therefore, in life, there are only two things: to win and to lose. The sacred trust we have left to the Turkish youth is to always win. I am confident that you will always triumph. In achieving the goals and taking steps to indicate the reasons and signs of the nation's progress, do not hesitate. We will collectively overcome the obstacles on the path to national advancement. For this purpose, you will apply your minds, knowledge, and, if necessary, your physical strength and determination. But, in the

end, we will undoubtedly reach that goal (Atatürkçülük, 1984, p. 343).”

Atatürk believed that sports embody principles such as idealism, courage, decisiveness, and morality, much like life itself. According to Altınok (1992), Atatürk's principles regarding sports encompassed the following:

- *Understanding the meaning and significance of sports, promoting and loving sports, and considering sports as a patriotic duty.*
- *Preserving, popularizing, and protecting our national sports culture (wrestling, equestrianism, archery, javelin, etc.).*
- *Ensuring that every Turk, regardless of age, gender, race, religion, language, or thought, engages in sports.*
- *Emphasizing that sports should not be solely for competition or winning, but rather a lifelong activity for everyone, from cradle to grave.*
- *Showing respect for the sports culture of all nations and ensuring that every nation participates in sports organizations.*
- *Promoting sports in a scientific environment.*
- *Instilling the idea that every Turkish athlete should prioritize the honor of the Turkish nation in international competitions.*
- *Promoting a scientifically oriented sports education to foster a healthy Turkish generation.*
- *Encouraging attributes such as love for sports, hard work, effort, intelligence, agility, diligence, and morality to succeed in sports.*
- *Upholding the goal of maintaining world leadership in sports culture with honor.*
- *Supporting successful athletes and sports through state sponsorship (Altınok, 1992, p. 25).*

Atatürk also emphasized the intellectual and moral aspects of sports, saying:

“Sports not only represent physical capabilities, they also contribute to intelligence, understanding, and morality. Those who are strong but lack intelligence cannot compete with those who are both strong and intelligent. I admire athletes who are intelligent, agile, and virtuous (Kocatürk, 1999, p. 329).”

Atatürk recognized the innate athleticism of the Turkish people, stating:

“The Turkish nation is born to sports. Even children who have just learned to walk wrestle in the fields. It is not only Turkish men who ride horses best but also Turkish women. Which nation

is more sportsmanlike becomes apparent on the battlefield. The extraordinary resistance and bravery of Turks on the battlefield, as well as their spirit, are evidence of their physical strength. However, using the term 'war' to signify the superiority of a sportsmanlike nation is not appropriate. What we see and know are the usual methods (Kocatürk, 1999, p. 328)."

Atatürk's vision was to instill discipline into the inherent athleticism and talent of the Turkish people through sports, believing that disciplined sports could lead to athletic success and contribute to a nation's progress and civilization. He also encouraged both men and women to participate in sports and emphasized that sports should be accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds. He envisioned a Türkiye where every citizen would be physically active, thus contributing to the nation's physical and moral strength.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's Views on Sports in National Education

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk recognized the importance of sports as a means of education and highlighted the parallel between sports and national education. He stated:

"All kinds of sports activities must be considered as essential elements of the national upbringing of Turkish youth."

Atatürk believed that Turkish youth should be raised with a sense of *"national enthusiasm"* in sports activities, which was an important aspect of their education (Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri, 1997, p. 262-420).

Even before the establishment of the Republic, the issues related to physical education and sports were taken into account by Atatürk and other statesmen. Selim Sırrı Bey (Tarcan), who had received physical education training at the "Royal Military Physical Education and Gymnastics Academy" in Sweden, played a significant role in the early initiatives related to sports education in Türkiye (Ahmetoğlu, 2011, p. 31). In 1923, a commission called "Hey'et-İ İlmiye" was formed to discuss educational matters, and Selim Sırrı Bey proposed the establishment of a "Terbiye-i Bedeniye Mektebi" (Physical Education School). This proposal was accepted by the commission, marking the beginning of formal efforts to introduce physical education in Turkish education.

The first step in these efforts was the opening of "physical education courses" in a building adjacent to the Istanbul Kız Muallim Mektebi (Girls' Teachers' School) on October 21, 1926. Selim Sırrı Bey played a leading role in these courses, and the training of physical education teachers began. Until the establishment of the "Gazi Orta Muallim Mektebi (Gazi Middle Teachers' School) and Terbiye Enstitüsü (Institute of Education)" with a specialization in physical education in 1932, 211 physical education teachers were trained. Many of these graduates went on to work as teachers in secondary education institutions and the Gazi Department of Physical Education (Bilge, 1989, p. 67).

Atatürk himself took a keen interest in shaping the curriculum of sports education institutions in Türkiye. He gathered information about sports education programs in foreign countries and arranged for talented young individuals in Türkiye to receive training abroad. The first individuals sent abroad for sports education were Vildan Aşır (Savaşır) and Nizamettin Rıfat (Kırşan), who were sent to Sweden to complete their training in "Terbiye-i Bedeniye" (physical education). After completing their education abroad, they returned to Türkiye and

played active roles in the organization of scouting and swimming courses (Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi, September 6, 1928).

During the declining years of the Ottoman Empire, women had limited access to sports activities due to social issues. However, Atatürk recognized the importance of physical education for girls and women, stating that girls should also be raised to defend the nation's interests and should receive physical, intellectual, and emotional education. As a result of his initiatives, Turkish women began participating in sports and achieving significant success shortly thereafter (Soyak, 2010, p. 441).

The Halkevi (People's House) organization, which was established in 1932, played a crucial role in promoting sports and physical education. Atatürk personally influenced the educational programs of Halkevi, including sports activities. The Halkevi's sports section emphasized the importance of sports in the education and national upbringing of young people, stating that:

“Sports and all physical activities are essential elements of youth education and national upbringing. Therefore, love and interest in sports and physical activities should be fostered among Turkish youth, and these should be turned into a mass movement, a national activity (Uluskan, 2010, p. 49).”

The sports programs of Halkevi included traditional Turkish sports such as wrestling, equestrianism, archery, as well as rhythmic gymnastics, shot put, and other modern sports. These programs aimed to encourage young people to engage in sports and physical activities and be educated through contemporary methods (Tahsin, 1932, p. 10).

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's Cultural Perspective on Sports

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk placed special importance on Turkish traditional sports, which embodied values such as valor, courage, humility, skill, ability, and mastery. These sports included wrestling, equestrianism, javelin throwing (cirit), and archery. He believed in the significance of preserving and continuing these traditional Turkish sports as they were essential parts of the national culture (Yıldız, 2008, p. 146-147). As a testament to this belief, these sports were prominently featured in the educational programs of the “Halkevleri” (People's Houses) established under Atatürk's guidance (Soyak, 2010, p. 457).

Among these traditional Turkish sports, wrestling held a special place in Atatürk's heart. Atatürk described wrestling as a game of strength and intellect and considered it his favorite sport (İnan, 1950, p. 157). He recognized that the Turkish people had an innate inclination toward sports, citing examples of children wrestling at a very young age. Atatürk believed that these sports were deeply rooted in the national culture and instilled trust and happiness in those who practiced them (Güven, 1939, p. 9). He showed a keen understanding of wrestling techniques and tactics during matches and was known to have attended and supported Turkish wrestlers during international competitions, such as the Türkiye-Italy wrestling matches in 1933. At the Maksim Salon in Istanbul, he cheered for Turkish wrestlers like Arabacı İsmail, Saim Arıkan (who defeated Italy's Fidere Lombardi), and heavyweight champion Çoban Mehmet (Güven, 1992, p. 39-43). Atatürk also invited these successful wrestlers to the Presidential Mansion in Florya and celebrated their achievements (Banoğlu, 1967, p. 190-191). He even participated in wrestling matches himself, often competing with his close friends and companions (Gürsoy, 2011, p. 114). Atatürk's commitment to wrestling was

evident when, despite feeling unwell, he attended wrestling matches held at the Ankara Halkevi in early 1938 (Ulus, 1938).

Atatürk also showed a strong interest in equestrianism. He acknowledged the talents of Turkish men and women in horseback riding and attributed their resilience and determination on the battlefield to their inner strength and physical robustness (Güven, 1939). Atatürk was an expert horseman himself and continued to enjoy horseback riding throughout his life (Belli, 2005, p. 27-28). He closely followed horse races and encouraged their development as a sport, which contributed to the growth of interest in horse racing in Türkiye (Özalp, 2011, p. 341).

Another traditional Turkish sport that Atatürk held in high regard was archery. Atatürk recognized the historical significance of archery and its potential to regain its former glory as a national sport. In 1923, he instructed relevant authorities to establish the Archery Federation to revive and develop archery as a national sport. This marked an important step in the revitalization of archery. Prominent archers of the time, such as İbrahim and Bekir Özok Brothers, Vakkas Okatan, as well as scholars and enthusiasts like Professor Necmettin Okyay, Hâfız Kemal Gürses, and Historian Halim Baki Kunter, played pivotal roles in promoting archery. In 1937, the Archery Sports Institution was established under the Beyoğlu Halkevi to further promote archery as a sport (Yıldız, 2002, p. 291).

In summary, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's cultural perspective on sports emphasized the importance of traditional Turkish sports such as wrestling, equestrianism, and archery. He believed that these sports were deeply embedded in Turkish culture and played a vital role in shaping the national identity. Atatürk actively supported and promoted these sports, both personally and through official initiatives, to preserve their cultural significance and encourage their practice among the Turkish people.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's Relationship with Athletes

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk believed that the key to success in sports lay in appreciating, rewarding, and encouraging athletes. During his time, many Turkish athletes who achieved international success were personally praised and rewarded by Atatürk (Sekizinci Beş Yıllık Kalkınma Planı, 2000, p. 5-18). Atatürk took a keen interest in the success of Turkish athletes, ensuring they received the recognition and support they deserved.

In 1924, Atatürk instructed Saffet Arıkan, the General Secretary of the Republican People's Party, to ensure that Ömer Besim Koşalay, who represented Türkiye at the 1924 Paris Olympics, also participated in the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics. Atatürk recognized the importance of supporting Koşalay's achievements and ensuring his continued success in sports (Atabeyoğlu, 1981, p. 60). Atatürk was pleased to learn that Kurtdereli Mehmet Pehlivan, a Turkish wrestler who had achieved international success, attributed his victories to the presence of the Turkish nation's spirit behind him. Atatürk admired this sentiment and recommended it as a guiding principle for Turkish athletes, emphasizing the importance of competing with the honor and pride of the nation in mind (Türkspor, 1931, p. 11-12). Later in life, Atatürk, who had taken up refereeing in wrestling, generously gifted 1,000 Turkish lira from his own salary to Kurtdereli Mehmet Pehlivan, a respected wrestler facing financial difficulties (İnan, 2007, p. 155-156). Atatürk remembered the contributions of this honorable wrestler to Turkish sports.

Atatürk also celebrated the success of Turkish athletes on the international stage. For instance, he expressed great joy when lightweight wrestler Yaşar (Erkan) Bey won the World

Championship at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, marking the first time the Turkish flag was raised as the victor's flag in Olympic history. Atatürk sent a telegram to Yaşar, saying:

“You have done a great thing for the country. Your name is now etched in Turkish sports history. Long live Yaşar.”

He also awarded Yaşar Bey two silver vases as a token of his appreciation (Gürer, 2008, p. 346-347). Similarly, when Turkish riders achieved success at the 1932 International Concours Hippique in France and the Mussolini Cup in Italy in 1934, Atatürk closely followed their accomplishments and took great pride in them (Ulus, 2011, p. 208). The European press referred to these riders as “Atatürk's Cavalry” and highlighted how the presence of Atatürk seemed to provide them with energy and confidence during their equestrian competitions (Yıldız, 2002, p. 246-247).

Atatürk's personal involvement with athletes extended to various sports, including cycling. When cyclist Talat (Tunçalp) Bey became the Turkish champion and participated in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, Atatürk addressed him as “my son” and provided guidance, emphasizing the importance of sportsmanship and ethical behavior as well as physical skills (Yıldız, 2008, p. 321-322). This demonstrates that Atatürk regarded all athletes who demonstrated determination and success in any sport with equal respect and attention.

Furthermore, Atatürk did not consider sports merely as a physical endeavor but also emphasized the importance of intellect, agility, and morality in sports. He stated:

“I love the athlete who is intelligent, agile, and moral.”

Underlining the athlete's role as a role model for society, encompassing not only technical prowess but also character and behavior (Güven, 1939, p. 130).

In summary, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had a strong relationship with athletes and valued their achievements highly. He not only praised and rewarded successful athletes but also personally engaged with them, offering guidance and support. Atatürk's involvement in sports extended to various disciplines, and he emphasized that athletes should not only excel in physical skills but also exhibit moral integrity and intelligence, serving as positive examples for society.

Atatürk's Relationship with Sports Clubs

Fenerbahçe Sports Club, one of the prominent sports clubs in Turkish sports history, was one of the first clubs that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk established contact with. Atatürk, who cherished everything related to the public, admired Fenerbahçe as a team that emerged from the public and expressed his appreciation for the club on various occasions (Granda, 2010, p. 88). Before being appointed as the Commander of the Yıldırım Armies during the final stages of World War I, Colonel Mustafa Kemal, the hero of the Battle of Gallipoli, spent some time in Istanbul. During this period, he visited Fenerbahçe Sports Club, toured the club's museum on May 3, 1918, and left the following inscription in the club's guestbook (Dağlaroğlu, 1957, p. 578):

“I had heard of the accomplishments of the tireless efforts of Fenerbahçe Club, which have been praised everywhere, and I had considered it my duty to visit this club and congratulate its enthusiasts. The fulfillment of this duty has only been possible

today. With my compliments and congratulations, I record this duty here.

*The Army Commander
M. Kemal”*

Another club that Atatürk visited during his time in Istanbul towards the end of World War I was Beşiktaş Gymnastics Club. Atatürk's residence in Akaretler was conveniently located near the club, and he used to watch football training sessions and other sports activities by entering the club's garden through the back door of his house. Atatürk closely observed the sporting activities conducted here, managed by the club's founders, Ahmet Fetgeri (Aşeni) Bey and Fuad Balkan Bey. On one occasion, Atatürk addressed them as follows (Somalı, 1978, p. 439):

“Gentlemen, I have been following your serious work and the achievements of your athletes with great pleasure and attention for a long time. Just as a youth deprived of sports cannot be effective in the defense of the homeland during wartime, even if the mental capacity of a human being develops to the highest degree, if their physical development is inadequate and insufficient, their body cannot carry their mind forward. When these young people, who you have gathered here and are trying to raise with scientific methods, develop both physically and mentally, they will prove the immortal strength of the Turks to European rivals not only in scientific fields but also in sports arenas. I congratulate you wholeheartedly and hope to hear of your successes at all times.”

On July 18, 1920, Atatürk personally ordered the establishment of a “Guard Team” within the framework of security measures. This team was led by Mülazım İsmail Hakkı (Tekçe) Bey, who had benefited from Atatürk's ideas and views on sports for many years. The team later evolved into the “Guard Regiment” and finally, on June 1, 1923, into the “Guard Force Club.” Under Atatürk's spiritual leadership, this club also started to engage in sporting activities (Türk Sporuna 50'nci Hizmet Yılı Albümü, 1978). This club, whose activities were closely monitored by Atatürk, achieved numerous championships in various sports disciplines, including wrestling, football, athletics, equestrianism, cycling, and polo. It also produced many military athletes (Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi, 1933).

Atatürk also had a close relationship with Trabzon İdman Ocağı, which is considered one of the foundational clubs of Turkish sports and played a crucial role in the establishment of Trabzonspor Sports Club. In June 1923, Atatürk accepted the honorary presidency of Trabzon İdman Ocağı, expressing his commitment to supporting youth and sports, and sent a telegram wishing success to the club's officials and athletes (Spor Alemi, 1923, p. 13). Atatürk's close relationship with this club is demonstrated by these important events. Additionally, during his visit to İzmir in 1925, Atatürk visited two other significant sports clubs of that time: Karşıyaka and Altay. He watched the training sessions of Karşıyaka football and tennis players and took commemorative photographs with them on October 13 (Aksoy, 1988, p. 100). On the following day, Atatürk visited Altay Sports Club in İzmir, where he expressed his admiration for the hard work of these clubs and their young athletes. He mentioned that through these clubs:

“You can be proud of the young people, and with these young people, we can confidently look to the future (San, 1981, p. 104-105).”

Atatürk's Contribution to Sports Organizations

The establishment of the “Turkish Sports Clubs Alliance” (İdman İttifakı Hey'et-i Muvakkatesi) in 1921 played a crucial role in the modern organization of Turkish sports. This committee laid the foundation for the Turkish Sport Clubs Union (Türkiye İdman Cemiyetleri İttifakı), which was the first centralized sports organization in the country during the early years of the Republic (Sümer, 1990, p. 20). The Turkish Sports Clubs Alliance was formed based on the agreement of sports clubs and held its first meeting on July 11, 1922, under the presidency of Ali Sami (Yen) Bey (Spor Alemi, 1922, p. 5). It gained official recognition through a cabinet decision on January 16, 1924 (Özmaden, 1999, p. 53). Atatürk was elected as the honorary president of this committee during its first congress (Akin, 2004, p. 60). This marked the beginning of the Turkish Republic's active support for sports and athletes.

The Turkish Sports Clubs Alliance became the sole authorized body responsible for directing and managing all sports activities throughout the country with the declaration of the Republic (Tayga, 1990, p. 162-164). Atatürk closely monitored the activities of this organization and provided recommendations on important matters related to it (Atatürk'ün Söylev Demeçleri, 1997, p. 259-263). During the period when this organization was active in Turkish sports, sports activities expanded beyond major cities like Istanbul and Izmir, reaching all parts of Anatolia. The number of professional sports disciplines in the country increased beyond football to include athletics, wrestling, basketball, weightlifting, cycling, equestrianism, boxing, sailing, hockey, fencing, tennis, and volleyball. Unified sports committees (federations) were established for these sports, and they became members of international sports organizations, participating in various competitions abroad (Demir, 2006, p. 7).

The growth of sports activities contributed to the strengthening of national unity and solidarity in the country. Participation in international sports activities allowed the new Türkiye to showcase its accumulated knowledge in sports on the global stage, enabling integration with the world in the field of sports (Özmaden, 2010, p. 1441). Atatürk's support and encouragement played a significant role in the development and organization of sports in Türkiye, emphasizing the importance of sports in building a modern and strong nation.

In terms of State Support Given to Sports: Atatürk in the Early Years of the Republic

In the early years of the Turkish Republic, it is evident that sports clubs, athletes, and sports media faced financial difficulties. For instance, in a letter written from the Ministry of National Education to the Prime Ministry in 1926, it was stated that prominent and long-established Turkish sports clubs such as Fenerbahçe, Galatasaray, and Gençlerbirliği in Ankara were experiencing significant financial problems. They were unable to meet even their basic needs, and it was suggested that if financial support were provided by the government, these clubs could contribute more significantly to Turkish sports (Prime Ministry Republic Archives, 1926). In this context, it is necessary to mention the government's support for Turkish athletes' participation in the 1924 Olympic Games held in Paris as an initial example (Prime Ministry Republic Archives, 1924). Additionally, activities aimed at encouraging sports, such as providing a 50% discount on train and ship travel for athletes coming from various regions of Anatolia to participate in the 1924 Turkish competitions in Ankara (Prime Ministry Republic Archives, 1924) and supporting the travel of Turkish athletes abroad to participate in sports activities, as seen in the 1933 trip to Russia (Prime Ministry Republic Archives, 1933), serve as examples of the importance and support that the

Republic of Türkiye, under the leadership of Atatürk, gave to sports and athletes, especially in the context of limited financial resources for young athletes.

It is also evident that such supportive activities extended to the Turkish sports media. In a meeting of the Council of Ministers chaired by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on January 24, 1925, the application of the sports magazine “Spor Alemi” published in Istanbul was evaluated. Eventually, it was decided to exempt a total of 53,680 kg of paper to be imported from Europe to meet the magazine's one-year needs from customs duties (Prime Ministry Republic Archives, 1925).

During Atatürk's era, the state showed meticulous attention to sports facilities, and legislative efforts were made to create a sports infrastructure that could keep up with the times (İnan, 1998, p. 172). In this context, the “Village Law” published in 1924 included provisions that encouraged village sports such as wrestling and javelin throwing (Village Law, 1924, p. 68). Similarly, the “Municipalities Law” issued in 1930 assigned municipalities the responsibilities of establishing and operating sports and game areas, children's gardens, racecourses, and stadiums tailored to the local needs of young people (Municipalities Law, 1930, p. 80). In addition to these, a significant example from this period is the decree signed by President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, upon the proposal of the Kütahya Directorate General of Foundations in 1926, which allowed a portion of the Yıldırım Beyazıt Foundation's land to be allocated for the construction of a sports area under the name of the sports area. This demonstrates the willingness to utilize foundation lands to establish sports infrastructure during that period (Prime Ministry Republic Archives, 1926). The “Guide for the Construction and Establishment of Gymnastics Games and Sports Buildings,” written by P. W. Scharroo, the Vice President of the Dutch National Olympic Committee, and Jan Wils, an architect, was translated into Turkish at Atatürk's request, published in 1933 by the Türkiye Sports Clubs Alliance. This guide served as a valuable source of information for the establishment of modern sports facilities in Türkiye (Scharroo & Wils, 1933).

As a result of Atatürk's sensitivity, determination, encouragement, and support for sports and sports facilities, a significant number of facilities for various sports were constructed across Anatolia in a short period, utilizing the resources of the state (Turkish Sports Writers Association Statement, 1981, p. 50-52). Among these, the “19 May Stadium,” which was opened on December 15, 1936, in the capital city of Ankara, stood out as Türkiye's largest stadium at the time, serving both Türkiye and the Balkans (Baydar, 1936, p. 3). Similarly, the “Ankara Hippodrome,” a modern racing facility in Ankara, was built with Atatürk's recommendation, guidance, and oversight in the same year (Üyken, 2000, p. 38-39). Other notable facilities established in the early years of the Republic included the Alsancak Field in İzmir, Fenerbahçe and Beşiktaş Stadiums in Istanbul, Sipahi Ocağı, Riding School, Moda Yacht Club, Fatih Wrestling Hall, Zonguldak Mining School Field, Konya Field, City Stadiums in Samsun, Trabzon, Kayseri, and Adana, as well as skiing facilities in the mountainous areas of Kars, Bursa, and Kayseri, and areas designated for equestrian sports in Ankara and Kayseri. As a result of these efforts, Turkish children and youth began to actively participate in sports activities through schools, clubs, and community centers (Top, 1938).

To address the infrastructure problems in Turkish sports quickly and effectively, expertise from the global sports community was sought during this period. As a result, Dr. Goenther (1928) was invited for mountaineering training, Hermann Altröck from Leipzig University was invited for the establishment of the Institute of Physical Education, and Dr. Carl Diem, a prominent figure in German sports, was invited for the organization of a comprehensive youth program and sports rehabilitation efforts (Türkspor, 1933). These experts conducted

inspections in various regions of Türkiye and presented reports to the government (Akın, 2004, p. 70-71). These reports were utilized to address organizational and infrastructure problems in sports.

The Physical Education Law and Atatürk

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, since his time as the Inspector of the Ottoman Youth Association, had been working on the development of a systematic and scientific Turkish Sports Law, which was more structured and scholarly than the research related to the establishment of Youth Associations during those times. In line with this desire, the draft of the Physical Education Law was prepared within the framework of Atatürk's wishes and directives and presented to the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye. At the time when this law was being discussed, Atatürk was in Istanbul and on his yacht, the Savarona. The Physical Education Law, consisting of 28 articles, was deliberated upon and unanimously adopted by the Turkish Grand National Assembly on June 29, 1938. The first article of Law No. 3530 on Physical Education states:

“A Directorate General of Physical Education, which has legal personality and is subordinate to the Prime Ministry, has been established for the purpose of directing and administering activities related to games, gymnastics, and sports that promote the development of the physical and moral capabilities of citizens in accordance with national and revolutionary objectives.”

This law was signed by President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on July 7, 1938, and published in the Official Gazette on July 16, 1938, becoming effective (San, p. 133-134, 1981). Mustafa Kemal Atatürk expressed his satisfaction with the enactment of the Physical Education Law, which he had hoped for and encouraged for many years, as follows:

“I am pleased to see the implementation of the (physical education) law, which the High Council has approved for the purpose of achieving the ideal of Turkish youth in culture as well as in the field of sports. All types of sports activities should be considered as the main elements of the national upbringing of Turkish youth. In this regard, the government should act more seriously and carefully than before and should raise the Turkish youth in sports with national enthusiasm (San, 1981, p. 135).”

Atatürk emphasized that sports activities should be considered as a fundamental element of national education in line with the principle of national identity, and he pointed to the importance of raising the youth with meticulous attention to national values in the context of the Physical Education Law's fundamental principles.

CONCLUSION

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's vision and philosophy for Türkiye extend beyond traditional notions, encompassing not only politics and nation-building but also permeating various facets of life. This comprehensive approach vividly manifests itself in the realm of sports. Atatürk's deep connection with sports reflects his broad aspirations for a modern and powerful Türkiye. This in-depth examination of Atatürk's relationship with sports offers a holistic perspective on how he perceived sports as a critical tool in shaping the Turkish Republic.

Personally, Atatürk did not merely view sports as a recreational activity but also as a means to promote discipline, resilience, and energy. His personal interest in and active participation in various sports activities conveyed the message that physical fitness was not just an aspiration but a lived reality for the nation. Such personal commitment reverberated deeply, setting an example for future generations.

From the perspective of the Turkish Revolution, sports emerged as an indispensable instrument of change. The Revolution aimed to transform every aspect of Turkish life, and sports played a pivotal role in this achievement. As society rapidly transitioned, sports provided both continuity and innovation. New disciplines and methods were introduced to integrate Türkiye into global norms. Atatürk's vision for sports intertwined seamlessly with his desire for a united, harmonious, and progressive Türkiye. Sports became a space for collective participation, fostering national identity and a sense of solidarity. Using sports for nation-building, it strengthened the sense of unity and diminished regional, ethnic, or sectarian divisions.

Atatürk's emphasis on the fundamental principles of sports highlights the profound lessons he intended for youth in terms of fairness, discipline, and respect. These principles extended beyond the playing field, encompassing life's vital lessons. For Atatürk, sports served as an educator that imparted values essential for shaping the character of Turkish youth. Furthermore, his views on sports in national education underscored his belief in the holistic development of individuals. Mental and physical development went hand in hand, and schools were not only places of academic learning but also crucial for physical education and discipline.

Atatürk's cultural perspective on sports was twofold. On one hand, he valued Türkiye's rich sports traditions and ensured their honorable place in the nation's consciousness. On the other hand, he embraced global best practices in parallel with international standards to advance the Republic of Türkiye. Tangible manifestations of Atatürk's sports vision are evident in his relationships. His interactions with athletes went beyond mere photographs, and his commitment to developing sports clubs reflected his dedication to these organizations as fundamental pillars of organized sports in Türkiye.

In the early years of the Republic, Atatürk's substantial contributions to sports organizations transformed the trajectory of Turkish sports. The establishment of central institutions, support mechanisms, and infrastructure shifted sports from a casual endeavor to a systematic, well-organized activity. Although the era faced financial constraints and infrastructure limitations, the prioritization of sports by the state is evident. Even in the face of challenges, sports were not sidelined; they gained momentum. One of Atatürk's most enduring legacies in sports is the Physical Education Law, institutionalizing sports at the national level and ensuring its importance could not be diminished by political or societal influences. The law represents a manifestation of a long-term vision for Turkish sports.

In conclusion, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's relationship with sports is a masterpiece of visionary leadership. He saw sports as multifaceted, unifying, educative, disciplinarian, and nation-building. Through his personal commitment, strategic interventions, and enduring institutional contributions, Atatürk solidified sports as an integral part of the Turkish nation. His vision continues to inspire future generations.

Ethics Committee Approval

For this study, the necessary ethical permissions were obtained from the Ethics Committee of Ataturk University.

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