

How we are: short introduction to the past and present of sport in Estonia

Kalle Voolaid
kalle@spordimuuseum.ee

The Estonian territory in the past

13th century: Denmark and Livonian Order
16th century: Denmark, Poland, Sweden and Russia
17th century: Sweden ("The good old Swedish Time")
18th century: Russia
19th century: National awakening
1918-1940: Independent Estonia
1940-1991: Soviet Union (1941-1944 German occupation)
1991: Independent Estonia

The influence of Baltic Germans

The Baltic Germans (*Baltendeutsche*) were mostly German inhabitants of the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea. They formed the social, commercial, political and cultural élite in that region for several centuries, as they came to the control after Northern Crusades of government, economics, education and culture of the region. In 1881, there were approximately 46,700 Germans in Estonia.

Naturally, the influence of Baltic Germans was strong also in the physical education and sport life of the Estonian territory.

The influence of Baltic Germans

Jahn's *turnen* (gymnastics) became widely spread in Estonia during 19th century. Turnfests (gymnastic parties) were held in several places.

Sports societies of of Baltic Germans were founded (gymnastics, sailing, rowing, cycling).

The influence of Tartu University

Sport teachers of university (horseback riding, fencing). Sport activities of the university personnel and students. University sport arenas.

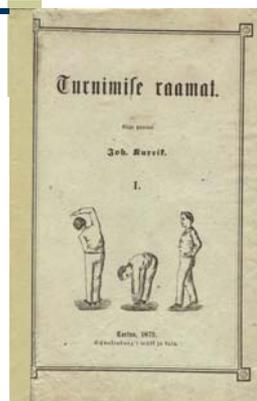


A view to the sports museum exposition. Fencing equipment (XIX century)

Early sport societies

Wrestling and weightlifting societies became popular. In 1888 in Tallinn Gustav Boesberg's society started activities, followed by many others.

Cycling societies followed. In 1896 in Saadjärve near Tartu first officially founded sports society started.

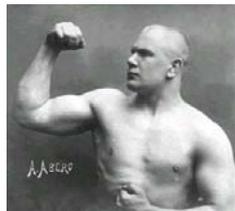


Front cover of the "Gymnastics book" by Juhan Kurrik (1879), first sport book in Estonian

The strongmen – famous trade mark of Estonians



Georg Lurich



Aleksander Aberg

Georg Hackenschmidt



Tartu-born Georg Hackenschmidt was the first athlete with Estonian roots to win the international title competitions: he became the European amateur champion in wrestling in 1898 in Vienna. After turning pro wrestler he became the first undisputed heavyweight champion of the world both in Greco-Roman and freestyle wrestling.

Popular sports



Athletics, wrestling and weightlifting, bicycle racing, swimming, rowing, football, skiing, skating



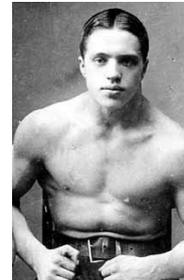
First skiing competitions in Estonia were held on the river Emajõgi in Tartu in 1912



Martin Klein (silver in wrestling in Stockholm 1912) was first Estonian to win Olympic medal. His semifinal against Finn Asikainen (dark trousers on the photo) is still longest wrestling match ever recorded as it lasted 11 hours 40 minutes.

Antwerp 1920

First time to participate Olympics independently was in Antwerp 1920. Gold for weightlifter Alfred Neuland was first ever Olympic gold for Estonian.



Alfred Neuland

Estonians in the IOC



Friedrich Akel (1871-1941)



Joakim Puhk (1888-1942)

Sports governing bodies in Estonia

Estonian Central Sports Union (founded in 1922) – to govern sport in Estonia in general, central representative sports organ in Estonia

Estonian Olympic Committee (founded in 1923) – to communicate with IOC, to represent Estonia in Olympic circles

After World War II

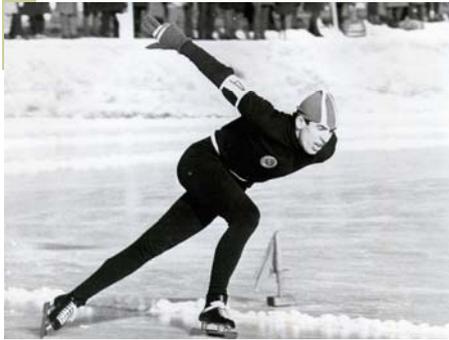
Soviet sport system changed everything. Many athletes lost their lives in war, many were repressed by Soviet Union, many left to west. Estonian athletes who managed to escape tried to represent their country in London 1948 but IOC denied. In 1952 first Estonian were allowed to Olympics again in Soviet team. Wrestler Johannes Kotkas won gold medal there.



Soviet period

Everything was centralised. Governing body of Estonian sport – Central Sports Committee – was small member of the huge Central Sports Committee of the Soviet Union which was the central representative sports organ of the USSR. For Estonian athletes was difficult to participate in the international competitions.

Most popular sports were athletics, basketball, swimming, skiing and “technical events”: formula racing, motorcycle racing, rally – were there their own Eastern European Cup competitions held.



Ants Antson – first Estonian Winter Olympics champion (speed skating, Innsbruck 1964)



The most important and successful team sport was basketball

The Singing Revolution

The Singing Revolution is a commonly used name for events between 1987 and 1991 that led to the restoration of the independence of Estonia with help of the spontaneous mass night-singing demonstrations. For the sport it started after Seoul Olympics with welcome ceremony of Estonians, gold medal winners in Seoul in Town Hall Square in Tallinn.

Early 1989 the activities of the EOC were restored and the contacts with the IOC were started with the goal to participate independently in international sport life.



Welcome ceremony of Estonians, gold medal winners 1988 Seoul games

The independent Estonia

After Estonia regained independence in 1991 the contacts with international sport organisations were restored. Already in 1992 Estonians participated both in Albertville and Barcelona Olympics.

Erki Nool, Olympic champion in Sydney 2000



Sports governing bodies in Estonia today

Estonian Central Sports Union (activities restored in 1990) – originally to govern sport in Estonia in general, central representative sports organ in Estonia. In 2001 were ECSU and EOC united with ultimate goal to create one strong central sports roof in Estonia.

Estonian Olympic Committee (activities restored in 1989) – originally to deal with Olympic matters, to represent Estonia in Olympic circles. After joining with ECSU, the national Olympic Committee covers Estonian sport overall.



Thank you for your kind attention!