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**ROMANIAN FENCING, A CONSTANT PRESENCE AT THE**  
**OLYMPIC GAMES**

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*Abstract*

Fencing is one of the sports that originate in man's need to adapt to his existence. Ever since the early moments of human society, the spiritual superiority of the human being has sought to compensate for his physical inferiority in relation to other living creatures. The practical result of these concerns was the invention of the means of defence and attack, originally intended for the gathering of food and the own protection, and then designed to cut individual and collective rivalries. Since 1896, the history of fencing has aligned with that of the Olympic Games. The first edition of the Olympics in the modern era took place in Athens, focusing on values such as nobility, honour, respect and tradition, reflected in the Olympic ideal. At the first edition, fencing was represented by 13 athletes (4 participating countries) competing in the foil and sabre events, by then the épée not yet being part of the Olympic Games. The events were entirely masculine. As for our country, in the annual hierarchies made by the governing organizations of the Romanian sport, fencing constantly occupies a leading position, the first 4 to 6 places, taking into account the national sports movement in its whole.

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## 1. Introduction

Fencing is one of the sports that originate in man's need to adapt to his existence. Ever since the early moments of human society, the spiritual superiority of the human being has sought to compensate for his physical inferiority in relation to other living creatures. The practical result of these concerns was the invention of the means of defence and attack, originally intended for the gathering of food and the own protection, and then designed to cut individual and collective rivalries (Zidaru, 2017, p. 1).

The evolution of weapons paralleled, step by step, the economic and social development of humankind. First, the accumulations in the field of craftsmanship and later the emergence of major technologies were subordinated to the improvement of arsenals. The materialisation of this subordination has embraced various forms, starting with the polished stone and culminating with the sophisticated current military complexes. An important place is occupied by the so-called 'white weapons' invented in the Bronze Age, which have their place in these days, with forms and destinations of use adapted to the functional requirement that has always been the social command. In a broad sense, fencing can be accepted as an organized practice of exercising with hand weapons, in order to acquire skills and abilities that ensure the highest possible efficiency of their use in the real conditions of battle. By 'fighting', we understand the direct man-to-man confrontation in wars, antique circus performances, classical Olympics, medieval tournaments, duels and current sport competitions (Zidaru, 2017, p. 1).

Fencing is probably one of the oldest games in existence, for it emerged directly from the duel, and the latter has been extant as long as there has been war. In the old days, there were duels between two persons and often between whole armies, depending on the conditions of war. The German tribes, which swarmed over the Empire at the fall of Rome, were perhaps the earliest people to recognize combat with weapons as a means of doing justice or of settling a grievance (*A short history of fencing*, 2014, p. 1).

Horia C. A. Rosetti (one of the first Romanian authors of works related to fencing) stated: "Fencing is the art of defending and attacking with the foil. It is a science, because the mechanism by which it is practiced can become a craft, and is subordinated to certain rules based on reason, with precise, calculated and measured moves. It is an art through the beautiful sensation it produces by combining all the rules with the very nature of the shooter who applies them. To know, to understand the rules of fencing, this is science; to reproduce them under certain conditions, here is the art, the materialisation of the ideal" (Zidaru, 2017, p. 2).

The first Romanian participation in an international fencing contest takes place in 1910, in France, Mihai Savu earning 1<sup>st</sup> place. In 1911, in Paris, the Romanian Dinu Cesianu gets 1<sup>st</sup> place in an international épée competition. Masters Badescu and Piper meet for the first time in a direct assault organized in 1911 at Baia Eforie, under the patronage of ASR Principesa Maria (Figure 01). It should be noted that, in 1913, the first statute of a sports discipline in the country, namely the Statute of the Romanian Fencing appeared, and the first technical regulation entitled "Competitive Technical Regulation" was also drafted. We also note that, in 1914, the IOC recognises the Romanian Olympic Committee (COR) that included fencers like George Bibescu, Dinu Cesianu, George Plagino and Carol Davila (Zidaru, 2017, p. 14).

The first national fencing championship is organized on 16 March 1920 in foil and épée, following the establishment, on January 12, of the Federation of Romanian Weapons Societies (Federația Română de Scrimă, 2017).

Toward the end of 1948, fencing began to strengthen from the organizational point of view: the fencing sections had richer competition activities, the national championships became more representative, new fencing sections were being created, new coaches were being prepared.

In 1932, on September 9, the Romanian Fencing Federation was established. The first notion of a sports calendar dates back to 1935 (Zidaru, 2017, p. 14).



**Figure 01.** Masters Badescu and Piper (Source: Federația Română de Scrimă, 2017, p. 1030)

## **2. Problem Statement**

Even if we consider fencing as an art or as a science of weapons, a means of education or a sport, what is revealed is its wealth. It is about the richness of a millennial history, a special technique and a eulogy, the wealth of champions and masters who impose respect especially on the values that fencing can generate and that they seek to inspire today by practicing it.

## **3. Research Questions**

The Romanian fencing has not missed the Olympic sports gallery. The continual upward trend in value of the Romanian fencing and direct scientists (athletes, coaches, technicians, other specialists) has materialised in winning a large number of medals at the major international competitions: Olympic Games, World Championships and European Championships.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to establish the distribution of Romanian medals at the modern Olympic Games.

## **5. Research Methods**

The methods used in this paper are the historical method and the bibliographic study.

## **6. Findings**

Since 1896, the history of fencing has aligned with that of the Olympic Games. The first edition of the Olympics in the modern era took place in Athens, focusing on values such as nobility, honour, respect

and tradition, reflected in the Olympic ideal. At the first edition, fencing was represented by 13 athletes (4 participating countries), competing in the foil and sabre events, by then the épée not yet being part of the Olympic Games. The events were entirely masculine. (Olympic Studies Centre, 2015)

**In** 1900, The Olympic Games are held in Paris, at the International Universal Exhibition. There were 156 fencers representing 7 countries. It is the edition where the épée becomes an Olympic weapon.

1904 – In Saint-Louis, the Europeans were represented only by a German and a Hungarian, and the superiority of Cuban fencers emerged through Forest (who participated in the foil and épée events) and Diaz (who participated in the sabre event). (Federația Română de Scrimă, 2017)

1908 – At the Olympic Games of London, foil was excluded from the Olympic program because the French and Italian specialists did not agree on the rules of this event.

1912 – The organizers of the Stockholm Olympics require changes to the rules regarding the valid area of play.

1920 – Antwerp reunited fencers from 13 countries, the hero being the Italian Nedo Nadi (who won 5 gold medals in individual foil and sabre and in the three team events).

1924 – The Olympic Games are held in Paris. It is the first edition where the women's foil event is included in the Olympic program; thus, the women's right to practice fencing begins to be recognized, but the men-women parity will end much later.

1928 – At the Olympics in Amsterdam, the French fencer Lucien Gaudin wins gold medals in foil and épée. It is the first edition where Romanian fencers participate in all three events: Mihai Savu and Gheorghe Caranfil (foil), Razvan Penescu, Dan Gheorghiu, Gheorghe Caranfil – épée, Mihai Raicu and Denis Dolesko – sabre.

1932 – In Los Angeles, the Italian fencers dominate men's foil and sabre, the great surprise being the American fencer Lewis, who won the silver medal by defeating the famous Italian Gaudini. Romania had no representatives.

1936 – At the Berlin Olympics, the electric apparatus appeared in épée (it existed since 1934, but it was not used in official competitions). This is also the moment when the metallic floor appears. The Italian school is in the highlights through Gaudini and Edoardo Mangiarotti. Romania was represented in men's épée and sabre by Nicolae Marinescu (épée and sabre), Ioan Miculescu-Prajescu (épée), Denis Dolesko (épée and sabre), Camil Szatmary (sabre), and women's foil was represented by Gerda Grantz and Thea Keller.

1948 – In London, a Swiss representative is registered for the first time (Oswald Zapelli – 2<sup>nd</sup> place in épée).

1952 – In Helsinki, the Frenchman Christian D'Oriola wins against the Italian Eduardo Mangiarotti (foil). The representatives of our country were: Vasile Chelaru, Nicolae Marinescu, Andrei Valcea (foil), Nicolae Marinescu, Vasile Chelaru, Zoltan Uray (épée) and Adalbert Gurath Sr., Ilie Tudor, Ion Santo (sabre). It is worth mentioning the longevity of Nicolae Marinescu (he was 45 years old at that moment) and his double specialisation (in two weapons).

1956 – The Olympic Games in Melbourne. Introduced in 1954, the electric foil becomes an Olympic weapon. Olga Orban-Szabo wins the silver medal in women's foil, being the first Romanian

presence on the Olympic podium. At this edition, Romania had only two representatives: Ecaterina Orban-Lazar and Olga Orban-Szabo, both in foil. (Federația Română de Scrimă, 2017, p. 1023)

1960 – The Olympic Games in Rome come with the appearance of the women’s team foil event. There is a record of participation (336 fencers from 40 countries). Women’s foil is again on the podium, Maria Vicol being awarded a bronze medal, Olga Orban-Szabo taking 5<sup>th</sup> place, and women’s foil and men’s sabre, 5<sup>th</sup> place. There were 7 Romanian athletes in the women’s foil event (individual and teams), men (individual) and men sabre.

1964 – The Olympics take place in Tokyo. The French world champion Jean Claude Mangan was defeated by the Polish Egon Franke, while in épée, the Olympic champion, the Italian Delfino, and the world champion Losert were eliminated in the first rounds. Romania had 10 representatives in all weapons, the best place being taken by women’s foil team (5<sup>th</sup> place): Maria Vicol, Olga Orban-Szabo and Ana Ene Pascu.

1968 – In Mexico City, the Romanian fencing wins the first Olympic gold medal (Ionel Damba - foil) – Figure 02 (Federația Română de Scrimă, 2017, p. 1033), and the bronze medal by women’s foil team (Ileana Gyulai, Olga Szabo, Ana Pascu, Maria Vicol, Suzana Ardeleanu) – Figure 03 (Federația Română de Scrimă, 2017, p. 1031).



**Figure 02.** Ionel Damba (Source: Federația Română de Scrimă, 2017, p. 1033)



**Figure 03.** Women’s foil team – bronze medal (Source: Federația Română de Scrimă, 2017, p. 1031)

1972 – The city of Munich is the host for the Olympic Games. Women’s foil team takes 3<sup>rd</sup> place (Ileana Gyulai, Olga Szabo, Ana Pascu, Ecaterina Stahl, Suzana Ardeleanu), men’s sabre team, 4<sup>th</sup> place, and men’s épée team, 5<sup>th</sup> place. Close to the podium, with a 4<sup>th</sup> place, were Mihai Tiu in men’s foil and Anton Pongratz in men’s épée.

1976 – The Olympic Games were hosted by Montreal. Men’s sabre team gets 3<sup>rd</sup> place (Dan Irimiciuc, Ioan Pop, Cornel Marin, Marin Mustata, Alexandru Nilca) and, in the individual event, Ioan Pop takes 4<sup>th</sup> place.

1980 – In Moscow, the Romanian athletes are close to the podium, but do not manage to win any medal, finishing 4<sup>th</sup> three times (Ecaterina Stahl – foil; épée and sabre – men’s teams), and Petre Kuki, 6<sup>th</sup> place in men’s foil.

1984 – The Olympic Games in Los Angeles. Women’s foil team finishes second (Aurora Dan, Marcela Moldovan, Elisabeta Tufan, Monica Weber, Rozalia Husti), men’s sabre team finishes 3<sup>rd</sup> (Ioan Pop, Vilmos Szabo, Marin Mustata) and, in the individual event, Elisabeta Guzganu was closest to the podium – 4<sup>th</sup> place.

1988 – The Olympic Games in Seoul. The electric equipment is introduced in sabre. The only representatives were Elisabeta Tufan and Reka Szabo, but they did not achieve notable results.

1992 – Barcelona. Women’s foil team wins 3<sup>rd</sup> place (Elisabeta Tufan, Reka Szabo, Claudia Grigorescu, Roxana Dumitrescu, Laura Badea) – Figure 04, while Reka Szabo takes 6<sup>th</sup> place in women’s foil, and men’s sabre team, 4<sup>th</sup> place. We also had athletes in men’s épée.



**Figure 04.** Women’s foil team: Elisabeta Tufan, Laura Badea, Roxana Dumitrescu, Reka Szabo, Claudia Grigorescu (Source: Federația Română de Scrimă, 2017, p. 1034)

1996 – The Olympic Games in Atlanta. Romanian fencing reappears with remarkable results: Laura Badea – Figure 05 (CSA Steaua București, 2013) takes 1<sup>st</sup> place in women’s foil, and women’s foil team, 2<sup>nd</sup> place (Reka Szabo, Laura Badea, Roxana Scarlat, Claudia Grigorescu) – Figure 06 (Arhiva AGERPRES, 2017). It is the first appearance of women’s épée event (individual and teams) at the Olympics.



**Figure 05.** Laura Badea Carlescu (Source: Arhiva AGERPRES, 2017)



**Figure 06.** Roxana Scarlat, Laura Badea Carlescu, Reka Szabo (Source: Federația Română de Scrimă, 2017, p. 1034)

2000 – The Olympic Games in Sydney. Mihai Covaliu wins the sabre competition – Figure 07 (Costache, 2016). There were only two athletes in women’s foil final eight (Laura Badea and Reka Szabo) and they only managed to earn 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> places. Men’s sabre team ranked 4<sup>th</sup>. In fact, women’s sabre and foil were the only weapons where Romania had representatives.



**Figure 07.** Mihai Covaliu (Source: Costache, 2016)

2004 – Athens. Laura Badea gets 5<sup>th</sup> place, and Mihai Covaliu, 7<sup>th</sup> place. It is the first edition where athletes also compete in the sabre event, Catalina Gheorghitoaia finishing 4<sup>th</sup>. Another premiere for our country was the fact that we had an athlete in women’s épée event, Ana Maria Branza.

2008 – Beijing. Mihai Covaliu proves again his virtue and wins the bronze medal. In order to complete the string of Romanian Olympic medals, Ana-Maria Branza produces the pleasant surprise of winning the silver medal in the épée event, a weapon with no Romanian medallists until that date – Figure 08 (Branza, 2017). The International Olympic Committee takes the decision that, every two Olympic competitions, one team event will not be held (men’s or women’s). Every edition, there will be a change of events that do not compete. At the 2008 Olympic Games, there were five men’s events (3 individual and 2 team events) and five women’s events (3 individual and 2 team events). 212 fencers were present, 12 more than in Athens. Romania was represented, except for the two athletes, by three more: Rares Dumitrescu (sabre), Virgil Saliscan (foil) and Cristina Stahl (foil). The competition calendar missed the men’s foil and women’s épée events.

2012 – London. The Romanian team (Rares Dumitrescu, Florin Zalomir, Tiberiu Dolniceanu, Alexandru Sireteanu) wins the silver medal in team sabre event. Rares Dumitrescu came close to the podium, getting 4<sup>th</sup> place. Other participants were: Radu Daraban (men’s foil), Bianca Pascu (women’s

sabre), Anca Maroiu (women’s épée – 5<sup>th</sup> place) and Simona Gherman (6<sup>th</sup> place), the women’s épée team (6<sup>th</sup> place). The competition calendar missed the men’s épée and women’s sabre events.

2016 – Rio de Janeiro. The Romanian team (Ana Maria Popescu, Simona Gherman, Simona Pop, Loredana Dinu) wins the gold in women’s épée teams – Figure 09 (Nistor, 2016). Romania had 6 representatives in individual events: Ana Maria Popescu, Simona Gherman, Simona Pop, Tiberiu Dolniceanu (5<sup>th</sup> place, men’s sabre) and Malina Calugareanu – women’s foil. The competition calendar missed the men’s sabre and women’s foil events.



**Figure 08.** Ana Maria Branza (Source: Branza, 2017)



**Figure 09.** Ana Maria Popescu, Simona Gherman, Simona Pop, Loredana Dinu (Source: Nistor, 2016)

Starting with the first appearance of Romanian fencers at the Olympic Games, in 1928, until the 2016 edition in Rio de Janeiro, our country had a total of 110 fencers, 34 in women’s events and 76 in men’s events. In total, the Romanian fencing won 16 medals in the modern Olympic Games: 4 gold medals, 5 silver medals and 7 bronze medals (*Romania fencing*, 2017).

**Table 01.** The distribution of medals in men’s events

Event	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total	Top
Men’s Foil, Individual	1			1	Ion Dramba
Men’s Foil, Team					
Men’s Épée, Individual					
Men’s Épée, Team					
Men’s Sabre, Individual	1		1	2	Mihai Covaliu (2 medals)
Men’s Sabre, Team		1	2	3	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	

**Table 02.** The distribution of medals in women's events

Event	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total	Top
Women's Foil, Individual	1	1	1	3	Laura Badea Carlescu (3 medals) Olga Orban-Szabo (3 medals)
Women's Foil, Team		2	3	5	
Women's Épée, Individual		1		1	
Women's Épée, Team	1			1	
Women's Sabre, Individual					
Women's Sabre, Team					
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	

As shown in the tables above, the women won 10 medals in total, the foil event having the highest number of medals (3 individual and 5 for teams), while the men won 6 medals, the most successful event being men's sabre with 5 medals (3 individual and 3 for teams). Unfortunately, in men's épée events and women's sabre, the Romanian athletes have not won any medal yet. Another eleven 4<sup>th</sup> places, eight 5<sup>th</sup> places and four 6<sup>th</sup> places can be added to these medals. To note that Monica Weber, who won the silver medal with the Romanian team in 1984, in Los Angeles, also won the silver medal with the German team in Barcelona (1992) and two bronze medals in Atlanta (1996) and Sydney (2000). Most medals were won by Olga Orban-Szabo and Laura Badea Carlescu, each with three medals, Mihai Covaliu – 2 medals and Ana Maria Popescu – 2 medals.

**Table 03.** Total Romanian medals at the Olympic Games (Federația Română de Scrimă, 2016)

4 Gold medals	5 Silver medals	7 Bronze medals
2016. Rio de Janeiro Women's Épée, Team: Ana Maria Popescu, Simona Gherman, Pop Simona, Loredana Dinu	2012 .London Men's Sabre, Team Rares Dumitrescu, Florin Zalomir, Tiberiu Dolniceanu, Alexandru Sireteanu	2008. Beijing Men's Sabre, Individual Mihai Covaliu
2000. Sydney Men's Sabre, Individual Mihai Covaliu	2008. Beijing Women's Épée, Individual Ana Maria Branza	1992. Barcelona Women's Foil, Team Elisabeta Tufan, Reka Szabo, Claudia Grigorescu, Roxana Dumitrescu, Laura Badea
1996. Atlanta Women's Foil, Individual Laura Badea	1996. Atlanta Women's Foil, Team Reka Szabo, Laura Badea, Roxana Scarlat, Claudia Grigorescu	1984. Los Angeles Men's Sabre, Team Ioan Pop, Vilmos Szabo, Marin Mustata
1968. Mexico City Men's Foil, Individual Ion Dramba	1984. Los Angeles Women's Foil, Team Aurora Dan, Marcela Moldovan, Elisabeta Tufan, Monica Weber, Rozalia Husti	1976. Montreal Men's Sabre, Team Dan Irimiciuc, Ioan Pop, Cornel Marin, Marin Mustata, Alexandru Nilca
	1956. Melbourne Women's Foil, Individual Olga Orban	1972. Munich Women's Foil, Team Ileana Gyulai, Olga Szabo, Ana Pascu, Ecaterina Stahl, Suzana Ardeleanu

		1968. Mexico City Ileana Dramba, Olga Szabo, Ana Pascu, Maria Vicol, Suzana Ardeleanu
		1960. Rome Women's Foil, Individual Maria Vicol

The coaches who trained (constantly) the above-mentioned athletes and the representative teams over the years were:

- women's foil: Ludovic Ozoray, Angelo Pellegrini, Alexandru Csipler, Andrei Valcea, Vasile Chelaru, Vlad Serban, Gica Matei, Lucian Glisca, Stefan Haukler, Romeo Pellegrini, George Oancea, Stefan Ardeleanu, Rodica Popescu, Maria Vicol, Olga Szabo, Tudor Petrus, Romica Molea, Ducu Petre.
- men's foil: Alexandru Csipler, Constantin Panescu, Angelo Pellegrini, Vasile Chelaru, Iosif Zilahy, Stefan Haukler, Romica Molea.
- men's sabre: Ladislau Rohony, Vasile Chelaru, Hariton Badescu, Constantin Nicolae, Nicolae Pufnei, Iulian Bituca, Marius Florea, Florin Zalomir, Mihai Covaliu.
- men's épée: Andrei Kakucs, Adalbert Gurath (seniors), Paul Ghinju, Mihai Echimenco, Ion Radulescu, Marin Ghimpusan, Ion Halmagy, Constantin Stelian, Victor Teodorescu, Octavian Zidaru, Nicolae Ille, Dumitru Popescu.
- women's épée: Octavian Zidaru, Milan Cornel, Epurescu George, Dan Podeanu.

## 7. Conclusion

The different types of weapon used by men are the foil (since 1896), the sabre (since 1896) and the épée (since 1900). Women competed for the first time at the Games of the VIII Olympiad in Paris in 1924. The foil was the only weapon used by women until the 1996 Games in Atlanta, which saw the introduction of the women's épée. The women's sabre featured on the programme for the first time at the Games in Athens, in 2004 (Olympic Studies Centre, 2015, p. 2).

Today's fencing is completely mixed, both women and men being able to compete in all three weapons, in both individual and teams events. The Olympic Games is the only competition that has decided to rotate two team events in every edition. Unfortunately, in the Rio de Janeiro edition, the men's sabre was excluded, where the Romanian athletes had real chances for winning a medal.

As it can be seen, the Romanian fencing has not missed the Olympic sports gallery. Women's foil is the weapon that has managed to win the most medals, but in the last editions, results also appeared in the other two weapons: sabre and épée, with outstanding performances.

**Table 04.** Distributed medals

Foil		Sabre		Épée	
Individual	Teams	Individual	Teams	Individual	Teams
4	5	2	3	1	1

We can consider these results as being special, given that Romania has 1,500 professional athletes in all three weapons, from children to seniors, and approximately 80 coaches. It is difficult to make a comparison between the number of athletes in Romania and other renowned countries in world fencing. France has, for example, 44,800 professional athletes and 55,000 veteran athletes (FFE, 2017). In the past years, in our country many private clubs appeared, and the athletes from these clubs have already confirmed in national and even international competitions. If we take into account the results achieved by junior athletes in international events, we can hope that other medals will be added in the future. We mention several junior athletes (medallists at the World and European Championships) who have the chance to assert themselves at the future Olympic Games: Amalia Tataran, Alexandra Predescu, Bianca Benea, Zsuzsa Schlier – women’s épée, Adrian Dabija, Adam Macska, Balazs Szilagyi, Alexandru Oroian, Mihai Bigea – men’s épée, Matei Aniculoesei, Razvan Stanescu, Rares Ailincea, Andrei Pastin – men’s sabre, Maria Boldor, Malina Calugareanu, Anca Saveanu, Rebeca Candescu, Andreea Gheorghe, Raluca Draghici – women’s foil, Silviu Rosu – men’s foil.

The results of the Romanian athletes at the Olympic Games are complemented by the medals won at the World and European Championships, World Cups, where numerous rankings on one of the first three places were achieved, since only at the senior level 210 medals were won throughout history.

In the annual hierarchies made by the governing organizations of the Romanian sport, fencing constantly holds a leading position, namely the first 4 to 6 places, taking into account the sports movement in its whole. The exceptions that prove the rule were the years 2003, 2005 and 2009, when the Romanian Fencing Federation finished first (Zidaru, 2017, p. 15).

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