

# A STUDY CONCERNING THE MEN HANDBALL TEAM UCM REȘIȚA IN THE FIRST YEARS OF THE THIRD MILLENIUM

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**ABSTRACT.** The evolution of the handball game in the last decades on international level has generated spectacular changes also at the level of club teams in Romania. A very interesting evolution was recorded by the handball team UCM Reșița, in the first years of the third millennium. This study proposes to present, analysing the reference sources for the approached topic, the way in which the men handball game developed in the town of Reșița, succeeding to obtain unique performances in Romania and Europe (winning three times in a row the Challenge Cup). Therewith, it proposes to answer the question: ‘Which were the factors which contributed to the team evolution towards the remarkable results obtained?’

**Keywords:** *handball, favourable context, evolution, performances*

## INTRODUCTION

Identified since the Antiquity as a social phenomenon in a continuous evolution and as a type of entertainment preferred by the Greeks and the Romans, practiced for the promotion of the health of body and mind (Pennuto, 2013; Paraschiv, 2016; Petrenko, 2017), the handball game became a sport towards the end of the 19th century, from the traditional ball games in Continental Europe (*hazena* in Czechoslovakia, *handbold* in Denmark, *torball* in Germany). It had a wide spread on international plan and a great upsurge, becoming today one of the most

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popular team sports in the world (Teodor, 2023). At the suggestion of Karl Schellenz, professor at the Normal German School of Physical Education in Leipzig, to adapt the torball for men, in 1919, the handball with eleven players was created. This was played on a football pitch, while the Nordic countries adapted it, from climatic reasons, to be played indoors with seven players. It became an Olympic sport with teams of seven players in 1972, at the Olympic Games in München, for men and in 1976, at the Olympic Games in Montreal, for women (Bursea, 2020; Popescu, 2023).

During the time, handball evolved from several aspects. First of all, there is an evolution of the rules, the game surfaces and the practice venues; then, there is an increase of the game speed (a shorter attack phase, the increase of the movement frequency and passing of the ball, the increase of the goals number) and finally, there is the increase of physical contacts as intensity and frequency (Rohozneanu, 2022).

### ***The occurrence of the handball game in Romania***

The handball with 11 players appeared in Romania after the official launch in Berlin in 1919. Professor Wilhelm Binder is considered the father of handball in Romania, the first coach and first referee in the history of the Romanian handball. The 'birth date' of the handball game in Romania is 18th June 1921. In 1936 the Romanian Handball Federation (FRH) is constituted. The same year, 1936, in Berlin handball (men with 11 players) is introduced for the first time in the program of the Olympic Games. The Romanian handball team participated in this first edition of the Olympic Games, obtaining an honourable fifth place from six participating teams.

The handball with 7 players was introduced in our country in 1930. It was played on a small court and it was considered as a way of preparation during the winter for the handball teams of 11 players.

The first international match of Romania was on the 7th of April 1936, against Poland, match which was won by Romania with 6-4. The first handball match indoors probably took place in the Obor Room in 1934 (Popescu, 2009). The period 1963-1972 was considered the golden decade of Romanian handball, due to the remarkable results obtained.

In Romania, the person who laid the basis of the handball game, from a theoretical point of view, is Ioan Kunst-Ghermănescu (born 11 May 1925, Lugoj – dead 30 May 1997, Kumamoto). His writings (*Handball in 7*, Bucharest, 1966; *Handball Course*, 1968; *Handball: The technique and tactics of the game*, 1978; *Handball: technique-tactics-rules* de Fritz and Peter Hattig; in collaboration with Ioan Kunst-Ghermănescu, International Handball Federation, Falken Verlag, Niederhausen, Germany, 1979; *The theory and methodics of handball* (co-author), represents the source of the most of the courses and books appeared in the last decades.

Among the Romanian coaches who made history obtaining remarkable results in European and/or world competitions, we must mention: Oprea Vlase, Cornel Oțelea, Nicolae Nedeff, Eugen Trofin, Constantin Popescu „Pilică”, Ioan Kunst-Ghermănescu.

The handball players who are in the hall of fame: Petre Ivănescu, Cristian Gațu, Gheorghe Gruia, Cornel Penu, Ștefan Birtalan, Radu Voina, Vasile Stângă.

### ***Men handball in Reșița***

With a 90 years' history, from the period when handball was played in 11 players (since 1958 this sport is practiced in 7 players), the male handball was born in Reșița in 1934 („Reșița, 16 august 1936”). In 1942, the team was sponsored and supported by the Iron Factories of Reșița domains, today UCM Reșița, and it participated in the final championship in Ploiești, together with representatives of the cities București, Mediaș and Ploiești.

During the period 1958-2001 the team was in the A Division of our national championship, the Workers Sport Club Reșița, financially supported by UCM Reșița. One of the legendary players of CSM Reșița remains the international handball player Werner Stöckl, golden medallist in the World Championship in 1974, which took part in the Democratic German Republic (Mitre, 1999).

In 2001 the club merged with CS Universitatea Reșița, CS Universitatea UCM Reșița, the team being supported also by „Eftimie Murgu” University in Reșița. In the 2003-2004 championship, CS Universitatea UCM Reșița promoted in the National League of Men Handball.

The team coaches during the period were: Adrian Ștot, Petre Avramescu, Aihan Omer, Gligore Czari.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

In order to achieve the objectives of this research we have used the method of systematic revision, analysing both qualitatively and quantitatively the specialised articles issued in the national and international publications, retaining those which have presented the team evolution in the period we analyse, these offering a detailed image of each match, highlighting the spectacular phases and the players who made them. We also used the inquiry based method in order to highlight the factors which contributed to the team evolution towards the remarkable results obtained as well as the graphical method for the representation of the respective results.

Once stated the research question: Which were the factors which have concurred to the evolution of the men handball team UCM Reșița towards the remarkable results? we have identified the local publication from the analysed period, we selected those who had a rubric dedicated to sport, especially to handball. Thus, we have taken information from three representative publications for the approach of the proposed subject: „24 hours”, „South-West” and „The Time/ Caraș-Severin journal”

In order to offer explanations for the exceptional results obtained in a short period of time, we administered a seven items questionnaire, built with the help of Likert scale with five answer options, to the players of the team UCM Reșița during the analysed period. There were 27 submitted questionnaires filled in by the ex-players.

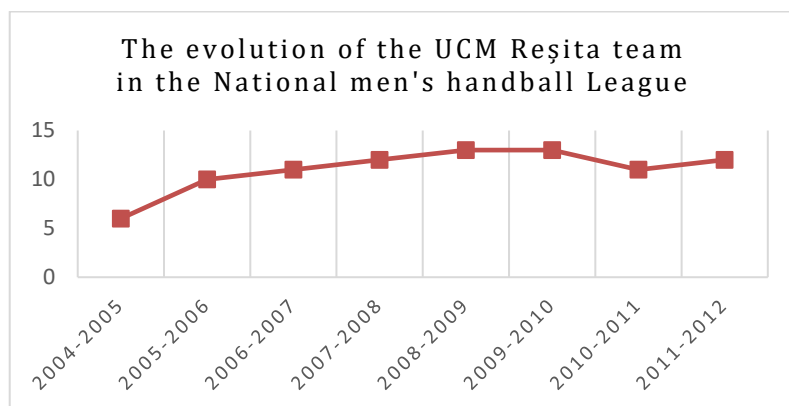
## RESULTS

After the documents analysis containing information about the evolution of the men handball team UCM Reșița, we have selected and systematised the results obtained by the team during eight seasons in the internal championship (National League – LN, men handball) in Romania’s Cup and in the Challenge Cup. They are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The results obtained by the men handball team UCM Reșița during the period 2004-2010

Season	Place in LN	Romania’s Cup	European cups
2004-2005	9	F 8	-
2005-2006	5	F 8	-
2006-2007	4	Place IV	Winner of CC
2007-2008	3	F 8	Winner of CC
2008-2009	2	Place II	Winner of CC
2009-2010	2	Place I	EHF Cup – R 3
2010-2011	4	F 8	Cup Winners’ Cup Quarter Final
2011-2012	3	F 4	Challenge Cup, Last 16

As we can observe once with the accession in the National League of men handball (with 14 teams), in 2004, the team has registered a constant evolution. Likewise, in Romania’s Cup, it was constantly qualified in its final tournaments. It was on the 4th place during the season 2006-2007, in the edition 2008-2009, it was a semi-finalist and in the next season it won Romania’s Cup. But the most important achievement was the winning three years in a row of the Challenge Cup.



**Figure 1.** The evolution of the UCM Reșița team in the National men's handball League

The answers received from 27 ex-players of the men handball team UCM Reșița are presented as follows: for the first question: „How much did the financial part matter when you decided to come to play for UCM Reșița?” 93% considered that it mattered in a high or very high extent, which proves that the handball players’ income was substantial, determining them to sign with the club in Reșița, weighing against other clubs.

For the question „How do you consider the conditions of the handball players’ activity achievement during the period when you were in the team?” 21 players appreciated them as being excellent, five considered them very good and one player said good conditions. The answers to this question highlight the fact that the handball players of UCM Reșița benefitted both of material resources (sport court, balls, equipment, training camps) and of human resources (coach, sport doctor, massagist, fitness coach) at an exceptional level.

Then, the handball players were asked to offer multiple answers in order to characterise the atmosphere in the team during the trainings and during the official matches. This atmosphere was considered by 23 handball players as friendly, 24 collaborative, 27 positive and other 27 respectful. These answers reveal the fact that the atmosphere within the team both during the trainings and during the development of the official matches was a trustful, encouragement and mutual supportive one.

The relationship between the players (question 4) is added to all the previous aspects, all the 27 respondents considering that there were sympathy relations and the discipline showed by the sportsmen both in the training room, during the matches and in their personal life, a fact which comes out also from the answers to question 5: „In what extent the sport and the personal discipline

have contributed to the performance achieved?”, the answer of seven handball players was that it contributed in a high extent, the other 20 players saying that it contributed in a very high extent to the achievement of performances.

As concerning the role of the public in the achievement of the team’s performance, 11 handball players answered that it was a high one, 16 players considering it very high. Indeed, a court full of enthusiastic people, a gallery which chants continuously the name of the team and which accompanies the team everywhere contributes to the players’ propel, awarding them a supplementary motivation to obtain victory.

For the last question, „ If it were to characterise in some words the period you spent in the team UCM Reșița, how will you describe it?”, the handball players have made a lot of appreciations from which we have selected some:

„With a big pleasure I permanently remember the supporters, the club people, the technical staff and of course my team-mates who helped the years spent at UCM Reșița to be the most beautiful part of my sport career.”

„First of all, I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the performances of the team UCM Reșița. Leaders, coaches, medical staff, players... Likewise, a grateful thought for the wonderful supporters who have encouraged us, standing by the team everywhere we played.”

„It is a big honour for me and the uppermost pleasure that I was part of the team UCM Reșița, together we achieved high performances, reaching the success of my sport career.”

„In a handball court full of supporters, together with wonderful colleagues, I have lived unforgettable moments in Reșița in the Challenge Cup.”

„I thank all the wonderful people who supported us in this adventure!”

## DISCUSSIONS

The performances of a team do not appear overnight. A series of factors should be taken into account, followed, analysed and improved anytime it is necessary.

The financial factor, concerning the level of the players’ salaries, it is a primordial one, which explains the coming in the team, the stay for several seasons of the questioned players and involving them in obtaining remarkable performances. More by token, there are proves of the relation between the players’ salaries (the real cost of obtaining success) and the team performances (Forest, 2002; Lee, 2012), The salary structure having effects on the playing style of the team (Franck, 2011).

In close connection to this first factor, there is the climate installed in the team (Mercea, 2011), that the respondents considered positive, based on trust, collaboration, respect.

Thus, we can outline the image of an atmosphere of encouragement and permanent support, seriousness, responsibility but also correctness, exigence and a lot of discipline both during the trainings and during the development of the matches. All these are needed in order to improve the cognitive results, the affective results, of the processes of team work and to obtain performance (Salas, 2008). Because, eventually, every team can meet glory or on the contrary, decline, according to the group of those who share the same aims, the same passion and work together in order to obtain success (McEwan, 2014). The performance of a team is connected to and based on the individual's performance (Soltanzadeh, 2018) and on the cohesion of the team (Narimani, 2008; Rezae, 2009). The construction and coagulation of a real, united, homogeneous team which is perfectly harmonised with the objectives to be accomplished, represents one of the basic problems of the coach and the relation coach-sportsmen is a defining element in the preparation and harmonisation of the team. (Șufaru, 2009), the motivational climate that the coach installs at team level influencing the sportsmen's motivation (Gillet, 2016). In this context we must highlight the importance of communication between the handball players on the one side and the coach and the players on the other side. According to Yulkelson (2001), the communication of a coach directly influences the dynamics of the group and subsequently, the collective performance. The communication in the trainings is qualitative when it is fluid and the receiver receives the correct message and during the game, especially between team-mates, when it generates understanding between sportsmen on the sport court. Understanding one glimpse, one gesture or a spoken sentence at distance is essential for what the team-mate is about to do (Iacob, 2008).

The material and human resources also constitute a factor which contribute to obtaining the performance. The studies prove that the players who prepare themselves in clubs which are modern endowed have greater chances of professional success (Arraujo, 2014). The answers to this question highlight the fact that the handball players of the team UCM Reșița have benefitted of both material resources (sport court, balls, equipment, training camps) and human resources (coach, sport doctor, massagist, fitness coach) at an exceptional level which contributed to obtaining the special results of that period (Drust, 2013). More by token, the coaches, sportsmen and the sport medical staff identify different ways to improve the performance and health of the sportsmen they work with (Odetoyinbo, 2019), pursuing the creation of a dynamic and positive sport atmosphere within the team (Gu, 2023).

Referring to the role of the public in supporting the team both at home and away, the specialists state that the moral support of the public compensates the power of monetary resources (Cotella, 2021, Pollard, 2017). Therewith, they consider that the team performances are substantially better in the sport leagues when they play on their own court, as compared to those of the guest team (Courneya, 1992; Pic, 2018). Nevertheless, in the final of the Challenge Cup in the season 2008-2009, when the men handball team UCM Reșița played the return match at HC Suceava, it won the game and implicitly the cup. There are also studies which support that the presence of a numerous public has negative effects on the sportsmen’s evolution, suffocating them, putting too much pressure on them (Toma, 2017), the conclusion being that the relations between the spectators and the advantage of the home team are rather low, the hypothesis of the „social support” according to which the bigger number of supporters help the home team to be more competitive was not confirmed (Straus, 2001; Schwartz, 1977).



**Figure 2.** Factors which contribute to the team performance

## CONCLUSION

This study outlines two aspects of the same subject, the men handball team UCM Reșița: the team *evolution* and *the factors* which have generated the respective evolution. The evolution was ascendant and the factors which were the basis of the ascendant pathway were:



\* Of *financial* nature, the UCM Reșița making possible the provision of very good salaries for the players and the other staff members, acquiring some valuable handball players who have contributed to the victories of the team and implicitly the winning of the mentioned trophies, bringing to the team the best Romanian coach at the time, Aihan Omer;

\* Very good preparation *conditions* offered to the players both for the matches in the National League and for the European matches (training, training camps, equipment, preparation matches)

\* *The atmosphere* within the team and *the relations* between the players, communication, collaboration, cohesion of the team have fully contributed to the good and very good play of the handball players on the court, in the matches they had, besides the sportsmen *discipline*, their seriousness in trainings, in the preparation and development of matches had a very important role in the evolution of the team UCM Reșița.

\* *The public*, the eighth player, has supported and encouraged the team both on their own court and in the away matches, having a very important contribution to the outline of the victory of their favourite team.

The subsequent studies could be centred on the identification and analysis of the factors which led to the descendent pathway of the men handball team in Reșița, since 2012 until the present and on the identification of solutions aiming the recovery of the team in a not too far future.

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