

# MARTOR



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Title: "Football '90"

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How to cite this article: Popovăț, Petre. 2005. "Football '90". *Martor* 10: 74-77.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: <http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/martor-10-2005/>

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## Football '90

**Viorel Moțoc, journalist, 35 years old**  
**Interview done by Petre Popovăț**



In order to talk about what the Romanian football meant during the '90s, we must take into account what it had meant before this time. Anyway, the year 1990 found the Romanian football in a very good and paradoxical situation: worldwide, the Romanian football had remarkable results. For the first time in twenty years, the national football team had managed to qualify for a final stage of a competition, while in what concerned the Romanian football clubs, the results within the European Cups were remarkable. Steaua was disputing the second Champions League final, in 1989. That, after having won the Champions League in 1986 at Seville, playing against F.C. Barcelona. In 1990, also at club level, Dinamo managed to qualify for the final stage of Euro League. Hence, the results on an international level were good, heading towards very good.

The national championship milieu was dominated by two hegemonic clubs- Steaua and Dinamo, one team belonging to the army and the other belonging to the Security Forces. Teams which gathered the best football players in the country and which thus had obtained very good results. In the past, the players used to earn more than the average Romanian wage, but nobody can say that they received the amounts offered to the professional players in the really important championships abroad. For example, for having won the Champions League, the players

from Steaua football club received an ARO car each and some bonuses of several tens of thousands of lei. After 1990, the income started to be more substantial, but by no means can one say that they reached the level of those offered by the Occidental clubs.

What I really wanted to say is that the situation present in 1990 affected the results obtained by the Romanian football during the entire decade. On an international level, the national team got the best results of its entire history (three qualifications in world championships, two qualifications in European championships) while the national championship kept on being dominated by corruption, padded results, a situation tracing its roots in that prior to 1990. Corruption used to exist before. A somehow similar phenomenon to that present among the entire Romanian society took place. Once the fear of the repressive security forces vanished, the entire environment atomised and each of us tried to cope with the massive loss of authority that the security forces and the state had registered. The privatisation of the clubs had been a pervert phenomenon, as well as that involving the state companies. For example, the main clubs, Steaua and Dinamo, step by step and by means of certain tricks (not necessarily financial, rather administrative) managed to be passed on from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of National Defence to the

hands of certain managers.

Favoured by a loss of authority, an interesting phenomenon, called 'the cooperative' appeared within the national championship. Before '89, the small clubs used to depend on the two big ones, being more or less their affiliates. Everybody knew that certain small clubs in the countryside were actually playing for Steaua and others for Dinamo. Meaning that, the moment they met the direct adversary of the representative, they used to be tough, while at the same time giving up their points in favour of the 'senior', of the 'mother-club'.

Once these major clubs started losing their authority, the small clubs regained their independence, thus discovering that they possessed certain power. Under these conditions, 'the cooperative' was the one deciding who was the champion and who was demoted. The following teams were part of 'the cooperative': Gloria Bistrița and its famous Jean Pădureanu ('Papa Jean'), FCM Bacău, Ceahlăul Piatra-Neamț, FC Argeș, etc. Other smaller teams used to join them as well. It was precisely the way it used to be during the championships in the past: one year pulling the strings for Steaua, the next, for Dinamo. They were dividing the points between them based on a mutual agreement: you win on your ground and I win on mine. If we were to compare this situation to the overall society, the presidents of the cooperative used to be a sort of local barons. The moment the centre turned weaker, the clubs gained certain independence, thus being able to manage their own business and to follow their interests. A certain part of the referees was also co-opted in this. One cannot make a general statement, but the situation with the affiliate referees had been known for a long time and if you wanted to avoid problems during a match, you were supposed to summon X or Y referee.

As a matter of fact, the Romanian football is no longer profitable. In order to attain this goal, a football industry is also needed, so as to gain

money from selling the broadcasting rights, from attracting sponsors, publicity contracts, tickets, subscriptions, an entire adjacent industry (which



presupposes selling T-shirts, flags, banners with the symbols of the club) and transfers, money obtained from the participation on various European competitions. In our case, all these are inexistent or very little present.

If analysing the '90s, the biggest money had been made from transferring players abroad. That was a phenomenon similar to third world countries. We exported raw material and all the money were spent on consumption and not on development. The major clubs (Steaua and Dinamo), those having the best players in the '90s, quickly sold them in the first years, thus getting the money. Both presidents, the one from Dinamo as

well as the one from Steaua, had been involved in legal problems. Vasile Ianul from Dinamo was in custody, while Cornel Oțelea from Steaua was on remand. At the moment, millions and millions of dollars had been obtained, but nobody ever knew what happened with the money. There was another case, involving Steaua, the one concerning the transfer of Ilie Dumitrescu to a club in England. The account books of the club in England were stating a sum, whereas in Romania, the situation was different. The difference resided in something more than a million dollars. What had been done with that money, nobody knows! The thing is that the presidents of the respective clubs, instead of investing money in modernising the clubs, meaning in building centres for children and junior players, in creating training centres, they squandered the money, so that nothing could be done with it and, the more the time passed the less we had to export and there was no other source of money left.

Given the fact that the clubs receiving the players were from the Occident, the transfers had to obey their laws. A club pays another club for transferring a player, then the player receives an annual fare and the negotiator, or the procurator receives his negotiable commission. The most famous procurators were the Becali brothers, Ion (Giovanni) and Victor. There are others as well, but not that important. Florin Iacob from Timișoara and Cămătaru in Craiova, Ilie Dumitrescu who made an attempt after quitting sports... But the main players in the Romanian football environment are under the supervision of the Becali brothers.

An interesting phenomenon was that of the apparition, actually that of the reinvention of the football supporters. They adopted an attitude different to that before 1989. In a certain way, they sort of turned professional, taking from the oc-

cidental models. Good and bad things together. The good things resided in building that supporters' corps (juridical persons). But they also borrowed some extremist habits. It is interesting to see how they adopted all this behaviour. The visual animation, the banners, the sound and light shows, an equipment called style. If you remember, the slogans that could be heard during the Revolution were actually borrowed from the stadiums. 'Ole, ole, ole, Ceaușescu is gone, mates!' is a slogan coming from the stadiums. Many of the songs sang during that time were actually rooted in the sports. Habit which was also perpetuated in the years to come.<sup>1</sup> During a world championship, after defeating England, people were shouting right in Universității Square, the sacred place of the Revolution and of the Ragamuffin movement: 'We the ragamuffins pissed on the hooligans!'

In the '90s, the national Romanian football team managed to obtain the best results of all its history. In 1994, Romania was present in the United States, in the quarters of the World Cup and it scored the fifth rank in the final classification of the championship. A real success for the Romanian football! The main players of the so-called 'golden generation' played for prestigious football club: For Ajax and Einhoven in Holland, for Real Madrid and Barcelona in Spain, for Chelsea in UK. Within the German championship, Lupescu and Dorinel Munteanu had played for years at the highest level in Bundesliga. A bit later, Hagi and Giță Popescu had really made it at Galatasaray in Turkey and, together with their team, they reached important stages in the European Cup. Mircea Lucescu managed to build a successful international career as a coach, winning a European cup.

We must think that everything which hap-

<sup>1</sup> Indeed, on 13th June 1990 there was a political demonstration, targeted at setting Marian Munteanu, the soul of Universității Square, free. During the manifestation, there had been an announcement concerning the resignation signed by Peter Mladenov, the former Bulgarian communist leader. Someone wrote on a big piece of carton: 'Mladenov: 1; Iliescu: 0' As if on a finger-post. People immediately started shouting: 'The tying, the tying!' (Petre Popovăț)

pened in football after 1990 cannot be severed from the phenomena taking place within the Romanian society. The Romanian football carried on a set of flaws pertaining to the previous system and, one way or another, managed to perpetuate them. At the same time, the sense of renewal and change also appeared but it was always affected by corruption and by the intervention of several people belonging to a system which used to function in the past.

A certain intervention of the political side was also felt, meaning that sooner or later, politicians discovered that it was quite fashionable to be connected to the football phenomenon and that, by getting closer to this world, they would

gain popularity. They used to go to certain matches, sitting in the official stand. There were also other politicians helping certain clubs connected to those pertaining to their departments like Steaua, Dinamo and Rapid. On Rapid stadium there is a grounds called 'Bănescu Grounds', since it had been built during Bănescu's mandate, while he was Minister of the Transportation and another 'Văcăroiu Grounds', built while he was a prime-minister, both of them being Rapid's fans. Today, George Copos, the president of the club is a Deputy Prime-minister.

*Translated by Raluca Vîjîiac*

