

Matjaž Hribar**FROM REAWAKENING TO DOMINATION:
DEVELOPMENT OF THE SLOVENIAN HOCKEY IN THE
FIRST DECADE AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR AS
SEEN BY SLOVENIAN MEDIA AND WITNESSES****OD PONOVNEGA PREBUJANJA DO NADVLADE: RAZVOJ
SLOVENSKEGA HOKEJA V DESETLETJU PO DRUGI
SVETOVNI VOJNI SKOZI OČI SLOVENSКИH MEDIJEV IN
ŠE ŽIVEČIH AKTERJEV****ABSTRACT**

The first decade after the Second World War is the time of rebuilding the sport discipline of ice hockey in Slovenia. Pre-war results of hockey development have been preserved only as a decreased number of hockey personnel with their knowledge and experience, while material circumstances had to be re-established. During this time, *Mladost* from Zagreb and *Partizan* from Belgrade remain at the top of the Yugoslav hockey, out of reach of Slovenian hockey players. This article aims to determine which conditions had to be met and in what way, in order for the Slovenian hockey players to win the first position in Yugoslav hockey by winning the National Championship in 1957 and remain there until the breaking up of Yugoslavia (with the exception of four years).

Keywords: Ice Hockey, Slovenia, Yugoslavia, history

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IZVLEČEK

Prvo desetletje razvoja hokeja na ledu po drugi svetovni vojni je čas ponovnega izgrajevanja te športne panoge na slovenskih tleh. Dosežki predvojnih let so se ohranili le v zmanjšanem številu hokejskega kadra in znanju ter izkušnjah, materialne okoliščine je bilo treba ponovno vzpostaviti. V tem času na vrhu jugoslovanskega hokeja ostajata zagrebška *Mladost* in beograjski *Partizan*, ki jima slovenski hokejisti ne morejo uspešno nasprotovati.

Članek ugotavlja, kateri pogoji so morali biti izpolnjeni in na kakšen način, da bi se z osvojitvijo državnega prvenstva leta 1957 na vrh jugoslovanskega hokeja zavihteli slovenski hokejisti in tam ostali vse do razpada nekdanje države (z izjemo štirih let).

Ključne besede: hokej na ledu, Slovenija, Jugoslavija, zgodovina

All quotes translated by the author, unless otherwise indicated.

INTRODUCTION

"Change the text immediately, my God, Jesenice is going to win! Stevo, please change the title to 'Unexpected victory of Jesenice'. And throw out the rest of the text!" (Polet, 10 February 1957)

This is how a journalist of *'Sport'* from Belgrade expressed his astonishment after the first third of the finals of the National Championship in 1957 over what was taking place in the rink. His words can be used to express the key moment of the Yugoslav post-war hockey, when players from Jesenice beat *Partizan*, the local favourite for the title of the National Champion. Jesenice won the title in Belgrade in front of a surprised audience of 10,000 – the title that they carried for the next fifteen continuous years, and in total twenty-three times (in Yugoslavia). Slovenian hockey players and hockey officials became the driving force of the Yugoslav hockey, they have formed the majority of the national teams up until 1991, a Slovenian Marjan Luxa even served as a senior official of the international hockey federation LIHG (*Ligue Internationale de hockey sur glace*). In 1966, Ljubljana was the host of the World and European Championship, *"still the biggest hockey event we have ever hosted"* (Pangerc, 2012) while the seat of the Hockey Federation of Yugoslavia had already been moved to Slovenia in 1952, most probably due to the fact that most of the development was being driven by Slovenian officials and coaches. Destruction of the Federation archives by fire prevented the research from a deeper insight of any response to the move by other Yugoslav republics.

This success was the level that the Slovenian hockey had yet to reach with its flagships (the Jesenice and Ljubljana hockey communities), even though the pre-war development of the winter sport discipline proved to be successful. This article investigates the time between years 1945 and the end of 1958, a period between starting to challenge the consequences of the devastating World War and the first session of the Hockey Federation of Slovenia Assembly after the Slovenians won the National Championship. The session charted the future successful development of the Slovenian hockey and signifies the end of the transition period, which focused on re-organizing hockey, on providing basic conditions for the game and training, and on drawing public interest to this dynamic ice game.

The article aims to bring forth the problem of the hockey personnel in connection to the drop in quality (comparing the pre-war with the post-war era) and the troubles, which hockey enthusiasts have faced at acquiring appropriate equipment and ice rinks, with an emphasis on the construction of rinks with mechanically frozen ice (or artificial ice rinks).

Furthermore, the article presents model cooperation between the Jesenice hockey club – the most successful Slovenian and Yugoslav hockey club – the Jesenice communities and the local economy. Jesenice was chosen as an example which delivered top results, especially as the research shows that other clubs either copied various elements of the Jesenice development or lacked recorded sources for a chronology to be properly established. Since Jesenice has participated on the republic and state levels with a major share of players and essential personnel, as well as it has heavily influenced the development of hockey in all aspects, their example seems adequate to represent the frame of the Slovenian top levels of hockey.

My research was based on the historical method of locating and analyzing relevant historical data. Primary sources were scarce, hence I resorted mainly to secondary sources – newspaper and magazine records, as well as interviews with the few still living protagonists of the Yugoslav hockey (a limited number of relevant individuals proved to be a hindering circumstance). The

sources used for this article have not been translated yet to other languages, therefore they are left with their original titles for the benefit of future researchers.

Rebuilding a tradition

After the Second World War, the newly formed political and social structure allowed for the restoration of hockey – a winter sport discipline that was introduced to the Slovenians in the late 1920s. Hockey could not have continued from the level reached in the pre-war period as the circumstances and consequences of the war heavily influenced the key elements: players, equipment and material necessities, and training. The sport had to compensate somehow for a significant loss.

A considerable number of hockey operatives were lost to the war. Those were the individuals who introduced hockey to Slovenians and developed the very well received sport discipline: the first hockey match in Ljubljana on 21 February 1932 was seen by one thousand spectators (Pavlin, 1999), which is a considerable number, when compared by two thousand spectators of the National Championship 1947 finals (Polet, 27 January 1947) or three thousand at an ordinary international match of Jesenice versus *Banik* (from Czechoslovakia) in February 1957 (Polet, 24 February 1957).

"Which comrade did not know the late Evgen Betetto? He was the one who encouraged and motivated us, not only in the ice rink, but also later in the infamous Dachau camp. We are lucky there were survivors, they will raise our ice skating sport even higher than it is now. We wish to see all sports societies with ice skating departments talk to each other, how to make it happen. By doing so, all interested in ice skating would have access to proper skating lessons." (Thuma, 1945). In addition to Evgen Betetto, dr. Stanko Lapajne, President of Ilirija, was also lost to the war, as well as many supporters of the development and popularisation of hockey, who provided for material necessities (ice rinks and supporting machines), logistics and upbringing of younger generations in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

The post-war generation of players demonstrated a significant decrease in skills of controlling the game, when compared to pre-war generations, especially in skating skills, techniques and physical fitness. That was evident not only in the case of newcomers, but also of individuals who had played hockey before April 1941, the beginning of the war in Yugoslavia (those players used to play for Ilirija, among them we can list Gorše, Pogačnik, Kačič, Pavletič, Gogala, Eržen and Aljančič). A report of two matches of *Udarnik* from Ljubljana against *Mladost* from Zagreb on 28 January 1946 is particularly interesting, as the author states that the hockey players from Zagreb had obviously been practicing during the war (Poročevalec, 2 Februar 1946). In addition, *Mladost* from Zagreb won the first National Championship after the war without losing a single match and without losing a single goal. This comment raises a question if perhaps the socio-political setting in the capital of the Independent State of Croatia – at least during the first war years - was differently oriented towards hockey than would be the case in the occupied Province of Ljubljana. *"During the war the ranks of hockey players grew so thin that the only almost decent team we could muster presented a mere shadow of the former Ljubljana hockey"* (Polet, 17 March 1947).

Further research into that context would help us understand the fact that *Mladost* from Zagreb performed much better than Slovenian hockey players, who won the National Championship as early as 1939 and in the same season formed the national team (apart from three players from Zagreb) which played in the World Championship in Switzerland (Betetto, 1990). During the

first decade after the war, the Slovenian hockey players successfully bridged their problems and confirmed their leading position by having Jesenice win the National Championship in 1957. Jesenice has defended the title in the next fifteen years, when it was taken over by Olimpija from Ljubljana in 1972. The Slovenian hockey players remain the leading force of the Yugoslav national team from 1957 to 1986, when *Partizan* from Belgrade wins the national title.

Dealing with constant shortage

The continuous shortage of hockey equipment and adequate material conditions for practice is definitely one of reoccurring features of the Slovenian hockey. Suitable hockey equipment entered the Slovenian regions at the same time as this sport discipline was introduced. Stanko Bloudek and Viktor Vodišek, sports enthusiasts and supporters, provided for essential material necessities – the first hockey set of equipment was purchased in Vienna by Bloudek (Pavlin, 1999), Vodišek took over the training issues with Bloudek being in charge of the ice rink, as well as of forwarding skates' designs to a shoemaker (Polet, 6 December 1959).

Shortage of equipment proved to be very important, as it threatened the opening of the 1947/48 competition season. The equipment used by hockey players in that time was "*completely fallen apart and they still have only nine hockey sticks at disposal*" (Polet, 15 December 1947). The Expert Committee for Ice Hockey at the Physical Culture Federation of Slovenia (FZS) managed to procure some equipment, but only enough to equip *Enotnost* from Ljubljana, however, they provided only the "*necessary upper layers, we are still waiting for the sticks, skates and shoes that we desperately need*" (ibid.). The rest of the equipment was not imported, it was produced by *Elan*, a company from Begunje. *Enotnost* justified its position also by the fact it was the only club with access to an adequate ice rink and with numerous youth as potential players. Despite the interest, hockey could not be played that season in Maribor, Celje and Brežice.

As early as the 1945/46 season, The Ministry for People's Health decided to introduce a so-called 'Physical-culture *dinar*' (fiskulturni dinar), a tax on every ticket to a sport event. This order was effective as of 30 June 1946; the funds gathered would serve to finance construction of courts, homes and necessary equipment (Polet, 7 July 1946). Despite this government decision, hockey continued to suffer equipment shortage – of any kind, not only top quality items!

Securing the stability of practice and matches

Difficult personnel and material circumstances - in addition to unfavourable weather conditions on natural ice rinks - most probably caused the National Championship in the 1945/ 46 season never taking place. The competition was announced in January 1946 with a venue in Zagreb suggested as the host (Polet, 11 January 1946), however the sources do not indicate the reason for the cancellation. The same season did see *Udarnik* from Ljubljana playing against *Mladost* from Zagreb in two matches previously mentioned and certain restructuring processes on the club levels. In late 1946, clubs *Svoboda*, *Udarnik*, *Borec* and *Štepanja vas* formed the *Enotnost* club (Poročevalec, 20 December 1946). The next season, the first post-war National Championship took place in Ljubljana on the rink below Cekinov grad. The participants were the Ljubljana club (this time they played as the *Triglav* club), *Mladost* from Zagreb, *Crvena Zvezda* from Belgrade and *Spartak* from Vojvodina. In the finals the Slovenians played against the Croatian club, with the latter dominating the game.

Ice rinks were immensely important for the development of the sport discipline, not only as venues for the matches, where players gained experience by playing against various opponents, but also as venues for learning and practicing skills, and for educating younger generations.

Well-managed and suitable natural ice rinks had already existed in Slovenia – to mention only a couple: in the early 1947 a renovated ice rink was opened in Šiška, a district of Ljubljana (Poročevalec, 11 January 1947) and the first post-war National Championship took place on the rink under Cekinov grad in Ljubljana. In 1949, Bloudek cleverly took advantage of the natural layout in Planica and constructed an ice rink for figure skating and hockey (Poročevalec, 1 January 1949).

Elsewhere, different solutions had to be resorted to. A legendary hockey player from Jesenice, Albin Felc, who was 16 years old when he started playing for the Jesenice starting lineup, remembers his childhood beginnings: *"As kids we used to chase around on the auxiliary rink, on natural ice, during summers it served a tennis court. The ice was something between ice and snow, as there was a lot of scooped ice and the rink has not been cleaned regularly."* (Felc, 2015).

Ice rinks with natural ice have enabled hockey practice and matches taking place, but in a limited number of occasions, as weather conditions have had an important impact, as well as the fact that hockey players had to share ice rinks with figure skaters. Furthermore, almost all hockey players from Yugoslavia have used the Slovenian ice rinks for their training purposes (Poročevalec, 19. December 1951). Unfortunately, those did not always contribute to the hockey development, as seen in the report of the plenum of delegates from Jesenice, Celje, Brežice, Vevče, Kočevje and Ljubljana, summoned before the start of the 1952/ 53 season by the President of the Hockey Federation Mirko Eržen. The delegates decided to abandon the ice rinks in Kranjska Gora and Planica due to the fact that their most regular users (Croatian and Serbian clubs) kept failing at covering due expenses (Polet, 16 November 1952).

The big leap of infrastructure

After the war, mild winters became a frequent occurrence, which has had a damaging effect on the natural ice rinks. Hockey officials and supporters have increasingly emphasized the need for artificial ice rinks – a condition for further development of the sport. Weather conditions have thus played a key role at organizing and hosting hockey activities, even on the highest state levels. Daily newspapers provide reports that it had taken the Hockey Federation until January 1950 to set the date of the national championship (that should have taken place only a month later!), the venue itself could still not be determined due to unfavourable weather conditions (Poročevalec 19 January 1950). Further warming prevented the national championship taking place altogether in that season.

The conclusion of the 1946/ 47 season saw Yugoslavia accepted into the International Federation for Hockey on ice and further efforts made for paving its way towards playing against the best hockey teams in the world. The Yugoslav hockey players issued a comment: *"As always, the season ended in the time when players started adding new things to the knowledge they gained in the previous season. As a result, there is little progress each year. It may happen that the next winter we will only get 14 days to get on the ice, as seen before. All that was gained will thus be lost again. Therefore, our main goal remains – construction of an artificial ice rink!"* (Polet, 17 March 1947)

In June 1948 the Physical Culture Federation of Slovenia organised a public tender for construction of artificial ice rinks, which included specific instructions of the Expert committee for skating sports:

1. *Sport societies who already have a rink or they plan to build one or enlarge it, have to submit a precise plan of the rink by 15 August 1947.*
2. *A precise section of the ice surface has to be submitted.*
3. *Each sport society should aim at having the rink suitable for ice hockey activities. Ideal measurements to be at 26x60 m. This instruction does not prevent the rink to be larger. More space in the rink will make it more suitable for practice of figure skaters, hockey players and other skaters.*
4. *Plans should include water pipelines.*
5. *Sport societies should submit lists of equipment (in a spreadsheet, if possible), needed to form hockey teams or figure skating teams.*
6. *Plans should include lighting wiring. Evening practices and skating has to take place in good lighting conditions, which has been so far insufficient. (Polet, 7 July 1947).*

Despite the tender, no artificial ice rinks were constructed in the next few seasons. Before the start of the 1951/52 season, the hockey officials concluded yet again, that hockey players accomplished only 18 days of taking the game on the ice per annum on the average, which was seriously deficient to make any progress.

A significant leap ahead took place in Jesenice shortly after. Jesenice was a town where endeavours of hockey players and officials alike, as well as the enthusiasm of all the population and support of industry led to the fact that the Jesenice players won twenty-three National Championships and have been the driving force of the Yugoslav hockey. As an example, we can list a record score of Jesenice over *Segesta* from Sisak in 1959 – 46:1, a forward Tišlar scored 11 goals in that match (Istorijat 1941-1980, 2015). Jesenice saw the construction of the first ice rink with then modern infrastructure. It measured 3,000 m² in size, after 7,000 hours of voluntary work provided by the locals. The ice rink had lighting, signalization and modern equipment at its disposal. The local supporters even provided for the equipment of the team and the youth team. A local member of the hockey department Matko Medja manufactured 30 pairs of skates, which proved of a similar quality to imported ones (Poročevalec, 6 January 1952).

A new chapter of the Slovenian and by that Yugoslav hockey began in Jesenice on 6 December 1953 when the first matches were played on artificial ice – which was of a rather poor quality due to the fog and some unforeseen circumstances (Polet, 6 December 1953). The new artificial ice rink enabled the Jesenice club to extend their hockey season from November to almost April, with weather conditions losing the upper hand over the season. In early 1955 there was a mention in daily press that most hockey activities take place in Jesenice, as temperatures elsewhere in Yugoslavia happened to be too high (Polet, 16 January 1955).

Another artificial ice rink was constructed at the approximately same time across the country in Belgrade, which marks the beginning of investments in artificial ice rinks infrastructure throughout Yugoslavia. Indoor ice rinks appear in later seasons (the first were built in Zagreb in 1961 and in Ljubljana in 1965). The Annual Report of 1975 submitted to the international hockey organization by the Hockey Federation of Yugoslavia states that there were 22 registered ice rinks with natural ice and 12 artificial ice rinks in the country: three in Ljubljana, two in

Zagreb, with Belgrade, Jesenice, Sarajevo, Sisak, Subotica and Celje each having one (Istorija Yu hokeja, 2015).

Co-operation that led to success

The artificial ice rink in Jesenice and its infrastructure had a positive impact on the local economy; for example, the ice-cooler produced energy capacities by cooling water along 17 km of iron pipelines (Polet, 6 December 1953). *"They have merged the ice-making facility (Ledarna) that brought profit in the summer, and in the winter proved useful to the ice rink"* (Polet, 15 July 1956). As early as in the summer of 1953 the ice-making facility provided 10 tons of ice daily available at minimum prices (Železar, March 1953). The co-operation of the hockey club with the broader local sports and other communities (the population, as well as the economy and cultural groups) enabled a steep progress of the Jesenice hockey, as well as the decades-long leading position in Slovenia and Yugoslavia. We have already established that the state system designed certain mechanisms of financial and material aid for sports activities; however, even the top organizational layers were mostly preoccupied with themselves, rather than with clubs and low-level associations. Therefore, the clubs were forced to seek other resources to obtain equipment and provide for training conditions, as well as to support and develop expert management (Polet, 11 November 1956). Such circumstances, merged with an obvious desire to emphasize the importance of Jesenice on the Yugoslav map, led to the situation where the initiative over the condition of the Jesenice hockey was taken over by the largest industrial complex in the region – *Železarna Jesenice* (Ironworks Jesenice).

'Železar', a newsletter of the *Železarne Jesenice* personnel, offers a comment that Jesenice met all conditions necessary to develop hockey up to a high degree. The sport discipline enjoyed an immense support of its fans, and selectors could pick their players from a pool of a significant number of interested candidates (from children and youth division to adults). *"A big and modern ice rink is an important acquisition, for which our gratitude goes to the Ironworks' management. They supported the construction by providing the material and labour force."* (Železar, January 1952). This line of action proved to be the right one, as in mere two seasons after the artificial ice rink was constructed, a report stated that *"the Jesenice and Ljubljana clubs stand much apart from the rest in the republic [of Slovenia; a socialist republic in the Yugoslav federation]. Jesenice has a great advantage of the artificial ice rink and the whole town lives for hockey."* (Lipar, 1956). *Železarna* was also the biggest employer in the region, at the same time it provided the necessary material and donated equipment, therefore it should not surprise us to find the Jesenice hockey depending on the company. That relationship was even more important during the period of the sport being on the amateur level – the players and hockey officials were employed by *Železarna*, which supported them by granting leave of absence due to hockey matches (especially those abroad) and by providing financial reimbursements. The latter becomes a delicate subject in the later decades due to the economic situation in the country; however, even in the period this article focuses on, there are indices that not everything had been kept clear from problems. After the tour of Hungary, Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic the *Železarne* management issued a promise to reimburse the income to their employees-hockey players, however, that has not happened for a considerable time (Lipar, 1958). Available sources do not indicate for how long has the situation lasted nor what were the steps taken. Whether it was a result of bureaucratic procedures (we may assume those would be less flexible in a company of such size) or the background of the situation is different – we find no clue in the sources.

Železarna thus remains the biggest supporter of hockey in Jesenice, even more in the case of the Jesenice domination over hockey in Yugoslavia, which can be interpreted by quotes along the lines of *"The National Championship shall take place in Jesenice... Železarna Jesenice will be the patron of the event"* (Polet, 22 January 1956) or *"Material support to the club was offered by Ledarna, the Commune People Committee, Železarna"* (Ulaga, 1958). At the same time, Železarna was the decisive player, which could run thing favourably for the hockey club or against it, as the communal administration has not reached beyond nominal governing power, while Železarna had financial and material sources at disposal, as well as technical capacities and experts. All those would support infrastructure development, construction of living quarters and sports facilities (Strajnar, 2003). The communal administration or People's Committee certainly have played an important part that the hockey community had to respect, as that political force which managed and controlled social movements and activities has represented a key part of socio-political environment, where the hockey players had their place. Furthermore, a direct connection between the entities existed – unsurprisingly: *"Comrade Frančičkin was then the president of the club. He told us that the management and leadership of the club were in the hands of the Communal People's Committee (OLO), which appropriates the profits and surpluses"* (Lipar, 1956).

Pride and glory

In addition to the support of local communities and consent of the social structure, we are obliged to mention the elementary capacity of the Jesenice people, the driving force of their success – the ambition to reach high results in a certain field and by that to put Jesenice on the map. Perhaps we cannot make too big of an error in concluding that local-patriotism represented a connective tissue between all relevant communities, especially if observed through a message by a local source: *"Hockey is also politics and we are being told that we, the Jesenice people, preserve too narrow horizons. How does this narrowness manifest itself? Is it the fact that our hockey developed into a massive sports discipline. The sport that won the heart of every Jesenice worker, so that he would tend to hockey after work in his spare time. Or perhaps in the fact that our working man remain faithful to the principles of Socialist relations in sports, which cheers him up and strengthens his working abilities. Everything else is a step back to the old, which has nothing in common with the healthy principles. Therefore, such politics does not help the development of our hockey. It is merely an attempt to save scarce traditions of hockey and a monopoly position with tendencies like 'Ilirija revived' or by scouting for the 'foreign legion' of Partizan from Belgrade. The politics with broad horizon got an answer at the conclusion of the National Championship. After a successful Republic Championship and with a better goals quotient we won the title of the Slovenian Champion. That brought us to the National Championship, which we attended nursing a hope to achieve the highest place, for we were aware that it carries the prestige of the Slovenian hockey and the honour of the Jesenice worker"* (Brun, 1957). A proof of efforts invested into the town renown and into building proper infrastructure presents itself in a decision of the Jesenice club assembly that each member had to complete 30 hours of voluntary work at the construction of sports facilities (A. J., 1952).

The enthusiasm of Jesenice naturally had to collide with a similar ambition of their biggest rivals – the Ljubljana hockey community. Not only during the matches, which are still susceptible to a certain degree of physical harshness due to their nature, but also in the media and later in activities of hockey boards on the federal level and on the national team (particular examples

can be found in sources outside of the time frame set by this article). Particularly noticeable were outbursts of fans, which occasionally represented a threat to the game, just as any fan hooligan would. This was especially evident in clashes against the opponents from Ljubljana, where exceptional aggressiveness and force was shown: *"... yet again does the author of this report warn about the improper behaviour of the audience; the officials should guarantee a certain level of awareness, otherwise we may not avoid a fate similar to that of Odred in Ljubljana, where the authorities overtook sports forums and closed down the only artificial ice rink"* (Polet, 27 November 1955). The hockey community in Jesenice and its supporters nurtured an opinion that the main media have kept ignoring their achievements, especially when those would surpass achievement from the Ljubljana counterpart. *"If our players win, there is an ever-so-slight mention about it the next day in the newspaper. However, if the Ljubljana team wins or even loses slightly against an opponent, there would be columns upon columns with big headlines about convincing and important victories. A nice example of such behaviour can be found in the match against Crvena Zvezda in January. Ljubljana beat it 11:2, while the Jesenice team won 20:0 against them. With an exception of Ljudske pravice with the 'Catastrophic defeat' headline (by our own reporter) the press covered much more about the Ljubljana victory than ours. Such attitude of journalist and their editorial offices certainly does not help educating our hockey audience. Therefore, we ask editorial offices to report on individual matches in an objective manner, to assess the results impartially and to present them in the same manner to their readers all over Slovenia and abroad. The local audience should muster all their virtue and extinguish improper and brutal disturbances and excesses of individual hotheads"* (Železar, January 1959).

CONCLUSION

The first decade after the devastating Second World War that influenced all levels of social activities presents us with the fact that the lack of material necessities did not remain an excuse for passiveness with regard to hockey. Determination, ambition and innovativeness of hockey enthusiasts led to ever better playing abilities and sport development, as well as to more advanced communal infrastructure and relations within local communities. The period set by this article has not attracted a lot of interest from historians – with few exceptions. The lack of relevant sources has proved chronically hindering to the research; a case of fire in the Hockey Federation archives in the middle of the 20th Century influenced the research immensely. Reports and articles in daily press and magazines (in Slovenia and the rest of former Yugoslavia) had to be consulted with more attention, as well as interviews, which offered scarce results due to the time distance between the events and the research.

The research shows that war circumstances have not extinguished the inclination for hockey, on the contrary, the survivors managed to pass their knowledge and skills to younger generations, who started to upgrade them immediately. Future research was proposed in the direction of placing the Slovenian hockey in the context of the Yugoslav state also through the comparison of hockey activities during the war. The Yugoslav territory saw various political units operating there during the war (The Greater German *Reich*, the Italian monarchy, the Croatian state, the Nedić Serbia and occupied territories), therefore we could find additional answers in looking into their respective inclinations towards the sport – at least in the initial war years, when there were funds to spare for social activities.

The research confirmed our hypothesis, that the Slovenian hockey officials understood the importance of properly maintained artificial ice rinks very early, as well as their role in developing the sports discipline. Weather conditions (mild winters) have had too heavy impact on the length of playing seasons, and they presented an obstacle to planned activities and competition. Ice rinks with natural ice were indeed managed to the best of abilities, however, they could not sustain the quality conditions needed for hockey development. The public shared that opinion, and finally also the ministry in charge, which calls for a public tender in 1948 to construct artificial ice rinks. Unfortunately, there was a lack of further steps in that direction, as in post-war Yugoslavia funds have been relocated continuously according to current needs. The first artificial ice rink in Jesenice, constructed in the late 1953, met the key material necessities. The playing seasons stretched to almost half a year, training programmes could finally be stabilized and the public was enabled to participate even further at strengthening the position of hockey within communities (local, as well as on the republic level and, finally, the state levels). Success was unavoidable and the artificial ice rink provided service to all Slovenian hockey players, as well as those from the wider Yugoslav territories, for training and competition. The way hockey successfully connected to the social and economical sphere in Jesenice is an example of good practice and presents a showcase of a successful module of relations between the hockey club, the local communities (with their governing institutions) and the local economy. The triangle of those relations is based on identifying hockey as an adequate element of connecting all three players in the role of promoting the region and venting the social climate, the latter has not always developed in the proper direction (hooliganism).

The research has shown that the first decade of the post-war hockey constructed foundations of developing the sport discipline that even today Slovenians identify as "the people's sport". Furthermore, the first decade set the conditions in which the Slovenian hockey players and officials took the initiative and later dominated the sport discipline practically until the end of the former Yugoslavia.

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