Original research article

THE APPEARANCE OF MOMCILJ TAPAVICA AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES IN ATHENS IN 1896
Olympic story of justice and injustice

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UDK 72.071(497.113) 929 TAPAVICA

SUMMARY

Momcilo Tapavica was born in Nadalj, a small place in Vojvodina, Serbia, and took part in the first Olympic Games held in Athens in 1896. He competed as a member of the Olympic team of Hungary. Research has shown that as a versatile athlete he was announced to compete in several sporting events and disciplines. But his competing in tennis is still somewhat shadowed by the layers of unveiled secrets and his name is nowhere to be found among the winners. Findings of this research are meant to, at least partially, solve this question and try to do right to this athlete and thus compensate for the Olympic injustice done to him.

Keywords: Momcilo Tapavica, tennis, injustice

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1. INTRODUCTION

Physical exercise as a specific activity has changed man over the centuries and millennia of human history, depending primarily on the social and economic circumstances man lived and worked in. But in order to grasp its development and create a picture of that time, you reach for the historical facts and trace them in different ways.

That picture, in our particular case the picture of physical exercise and competition, over time and social conditions can complete, together with other images, a period in the development of a society. But, the story of the past is based on the historical facts and sources assisting these facts. In addition the history of physical education or physical education and sport, is based on the belief that someone had recorded certain events, but one always takes it with a certain amount of caution, requiring all claims to be checked scientifically. Very often, due to this fact, we reveal new historical facts not only supplementing the existing picture of the given time and events in that time, but also completely changing the existing image of them.

This research was organized and conducted as a modest contribution to this effort and also an opportunity to highlight a particular historical period in sports history. In this context we wanted to illuminate Momcilo Tapavica's performance in the first Olympics held in Athens in 1896. We also wanted to reveal the mystery, and possible reasons for the incomplete information about his performance in tennis and sports tacit result achieved in these competitions. He lived in Montenegro after 1904, and had immense contribution to the development of tennis in Montenegro. There are indicators that he, among other sports, was a great lover of tennis.

This versatile athlete, born in Nadali, a small town near Novi Sad, Serbia, took part in the First Olympic Games. He competed in these Olympic Games in several sports disciplines. However, until now there are available data on his performance at the Olympic Games, only in weightlifting and wrestling. Nowhere is to find the record on his competing in tennis. However, there are indications that Momcilo Tapavica not only participated in the tennis competition, but that he had achieved considerable sporting success.¹

2. METHODS, OBJECT AND PROBLEM OF THE RESEARCH

2.1. Methods

For the purposes of this study historical methods were used, bibliographic speculative methods, descriptive methods, and interview as one of the scientific techniques.

2.2. Object and problem

Because of its attractiveness and popularity tennis has found its place in the Olympic program. On that occasion competitions were held viewed by great number of spectators. However, in all the publications describing the First Olympic Games among the names of players who have won medals, there are only two names. Nowhere does anyone mention the name of the winner of the bronze medal.

It is known that the Serb Momcilo Tapavica participated in the First Olympic Games. He competed in several sports, and one of them was the competition in tennis. However, for some reason he was not listed anywhere nor were the results he achieved in tennis.

All these reasons became the subject of this research investigating a sports performance of Momcilo Tapavica in the First Olympic Games.

Bearing in mind the subject of the research we can say that the research problem is the appearance of the Serb Momcilo Tapavica in the First Olympic Games and for some unknown reasons hiding his successful sports performance in tennis in Athens in 1896.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Life of Momcilo Tapavica

Momcilo Tapavica was born on 26/10/1872 in Nadalj, a small town near Novi Sad.

As a boy, Momcilo Tapavica attended elementary school in his native place, a high school in Novi Sad and Szeged. He graduated on 7 June in 1890. As a good student he received a scholarship and Serbian Matica in 1890/91 helped him enrol at the chemical department of the Technical University of Budapest.

Even as a high school student, especially as a student, Momcilo Tapavica showed versatile talents for sports. He was an excellent student and even better athlete, while, as contemporaries said, quiet and withdrawn young man,
participating in various competitions in various sports disciplines achieving outstanding sports results. He was a member of the exercising company called - National track-association. Generally he used to win first places in the disciplines: long jump, high jump, shot put. And in a contest that was held on 12 December in 1895 in honour of the minister of religion, culture and sport, Vlasic Gyula, he won the first place in pole vault, shot put and long jump. These results referred him to become a member of the Hungarian Olympic team that participated in the First Olympic Games. But to the Olympic Games he would travel at his own expense.

As an architect, has designed many beautiful buildings in Serbia and Montenegro. Some of them are now under state protection.

He died in Pula 10th January 1949 where he was buried.

3.2. The organization of the first Olympic Games

The Athenians put a lot of effort in organizing the first Olympic Games in the New Age. Renovation of the stadium for 60,000 spectators, the construction time for the marathon race and other sports called for a lot of financial resources and building skills. All this done in a satisfactory manner the games could begin.

This event was reported briefly in the Serbian News: „Prince discovered on the first day of Easter Averos monument, which has the most merit for the Olympics. Professor Kemenji in Budapest gave a speech on behalf of the Hungarian gymnasts. Time is rainy, so it is suspected that the festivities will begin tomorrow.“

Fortunately, the organizers of the games officially opened them as planned, and it was the Greek king George I who did it. During the opening ceremony of the games, before a full stadium, field athletes had been lined up. Spectators and athletes were first addressed by the President of the Organizing Committee, the

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2 In the section about the first new Olympic games, the IOC website states that there were 80,000 people at the stadium, including the Greek king’s family.

3 Serbian Gazette, March 28th, 1896 (the Julian calendar)
older son of Prince Constantine the Greek king, and after his father King George officially opened the games. After that the Greek king, accompanied by nine bands and 150 singers sang the Olympic anthem.4

Immediately after the opening ceremony the competition began. It is recorded that the first gold medallist in the first Olympic Games was an American athlete James Connolly. He won first place in the triple jump with a score of 13.71 feet.

On the second day competed Momcilo Tapavica, but this was not recorded in the Serbian Newspapers. It could be expected because Momcilo Tapavica competed for the Hungarian Olympic team. That day he had been reported to compete in three sports disciplines: long jump, shot put and weightlifting.5

Table 1. Sports program at the Olympic Games (The reconstruction of events is based on various sources, the nearest actual events. Dates are given according to the new calendar) [5]

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<th>April 1896.</th>
<th>Mon 6</th>
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<th>Wed 8</th>
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4 The Olympic Anthem was composed by Spiros Samaros. Its lyrics were written by Kostis Palamas.

5 According to Hrvoje Macanovic, in the book About the Olympic Games J. Gut lists the names of all competitors on Tuesday, April 7th, 1896 – the second day of competitions (the new calendar). Momcilo Tapavica is among them.
3.3. Sports represented at the first Olympic Games

The first Olympic Games, held in Athens in 1896, were the games that started the "Olympic wheel" that is, with breaks caused by world wars 20th century, that has been spinning for a more than a century. Because of that fact one does not have to be so strict in the assessment of the records of competitors and their results were not updated and were extremely imprecise.

After consulting a number of sources and materials dealing with this issue it can be said with great certainty that 13 sports were represented the Olympics program. However, according to the same data events were organized in only 9 (nine) sports.

Following sports were on the program:

- Athletics
- Weightlifting
- Wrestling
- Fencing
- Shooting
- Cycling
- Gymnastics
- Swimming
- Tennis
- Rowing
- Sailing
- Cricket
- Football.

However, there are no reports on actual sports results in rowing, sailing, cricket and football. It is assumed that due to bad weather competitions in rowing and sailing were not held and because of poor response representative selection competitions were held in cricket and football. This is a logical explanation because large number of athletes financed their own travelling to the Games. It was noted that the Irishman John P. Boland (John Pius Boland) not only travelled at his own expense but he had arrived in Athens a month earlier in order to prepare for the advent of the First Olympic Games. Preparations were fruitful and it was recorded that he won first place in tennis, singles and doubles.

Within these nine sports athletes competed in 43 sports disciplines. Most numerous events were in athletics and gymnastics. Tennis was organized in individual and doubles.
3.4. Athletes in the First Olympic Games

The number of athletes participating at the First Olympic Games is also doubtful. But most sports historians accept the figure of 200 athletes from 14 countries: USA, Great Britain, France, Germany, Hungary, Switzerland, Bulgaria, Australia, Chile, Austria, Denmark, Italy, Greece. Of course, the hosts had the largest sports team and won the most medals, a total of 47, but the athletes from the United States won one gold medal more than the Greeks (United States-11, Greece - 10) and therefore USA were first on the list of the Olympic teams (6).

Some of the athletes who have appeared in the first Olympic Games, probably later signed up for some of the national Olympic teams. So Charles Chamaud, though Swiss, registered to compete for Bulgaria because at that time he lived in Bulgaria. At the same time, the other two Swiss were listed as participants of Switzerland. Then, the Greek Kasadaglis Denis, who competed under the flag of Egypt, because he lived in Egypt took second place in tennis and

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6 Russia and Belgium have signed their athletes up for the Games, but they never arrived to Athens. Also, there is one athlete mentioned as a contestant from Chile, but there are no records of his results.

7 The Americans were especially proud to claim 9 out of 12 golden medals in athletics. After almost a month spent traveling, they arrived to Athens on April 5th, 1896, and that's why the first Olympic medal holds great importance for them.
was listed in the Greek Olympic athlete selection. For the Hungarian Olympic selection competed not only Mocmilo Tapavica but also the Serbs from Vojvodina and competitors from today’s Slovakia. It is characteristic that later an Italian registered for the Italian Olympic team at these Games and he competed as Rivabell. Another Italian Carlo Airolt was disqualified because it was found that he was a professional, which was contrary to the applicable principles of amateurism.

It should be noted that at that time Austria and Hungary represented one country, but they had separate Olympic teams. Also, Australia and Cyprus had been under the domination of Great Britain and were not independent. But while a competitor was registered for the Australian Olympic team, and was listed in the order of countries which took part in these games, as a Greek who lived in Cyprus he was not registered for the Olympic selection of Cyprus.

The publications in which the alleged number of 200 athletes participated in the First Olympic Games usually in some part of the theoretical approach to this problem, use the word - approx This is, of course, the precise formulation of constraints and data, which indicates that there is a lot unknown regarding this game. The data can be found in other works, including official sites, and are completely different, saying that the records of competitors and their results were later rebuilt and should be accepted with a pinch of salt.

Thus, the site of the Olympic Committee, when it comes to the number of athletes who participated in the First Olympic Games of the modern era claims about 241 athletes This is a significant increase in the number of athletes. But another article that actually talks about Mocmilo Tapavica, when it comes to the number of athletes who participated in these games, raises this number to 285 participants. According to another site there were about 311 athletes participating in the competition. Thus different numbers show different

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8 There is a spreadsheet in the book THE OLYMPIC GAMES Athens 1896 – Athens 2004 that lists 200 athletes competing at the First Olympic Games in Athens, but in the text about the Games it is stated that there were approximately 200 athletes competing in Athens in 1896.

9 www.olympic.org/uk

10 In his work The First Citizen of Novi Sad in the Olympic Games, with the appropriate subtitle, the author M. Vranic cites that there were 285 athletes competing in the Games, but omits the source of the information.

11 The site www.olympic.org cites that there were 311 athletes competing in the First Olympic Games. According to them, 13 countries were represented (without Italy). Referencing to the book The Complete Book of the Olympics by David Wallechinsky, the site cites that the Greek selection was the largest with 230 competitors, France and Germany had 19 representatives each. The UK and Hungary – 8 each, Austria and Denmark – 4 each, while Australia, Chile, Sweden, Switzerland
estimates of athletes and their results due to possible failures in recording the names of those who had achieved best results. We assume that, not intentionally, there were gaps in the evidence related to Momcilo Tapavica as well.

The reason for this is certainly the fact that an athlete could compete in more than one sport. And if you take into account that many of them for various reasons gave up the competition in some sports disciplines, it is possible that records were not updated because of the chaos and disorientation of judges who judged according to the rules of various associations and clubs and had made various mistakes. One of these is the error made about the appearance of Momcilo Tapavica in tennis.

Also, we believe that up to date national leadership sought to search their athletes, and these were recorded and published in the media, domestic and foreign ones. However, these were plagued by errors that can lead to problems in analyses and inadequate access without multiple test data. We will present a typical example. Namely, the Serbian Newspapers noted that the second place in the 1000m race was won by the Hungarian athlete Sekali.¹²

In addition to the wrong names and wrong places it was also a wrong fact that it was a 1000m race because there was no such race in the Olympic program. It is likely that this is a technical error, which can create additional problems because it was a 100m race. In that race, Louis Sokol (Alajos Szokolyi) won the third place. It is also not correct to cite information related to the other athlete because, Nandor Dani finished third in triple jump but he ranked second in 800 feet run.¹³

This same error appeared in a publication in English which aims to offer readers the exact image of the Olympic Games. The book of Haralampos Anionis, the English edition, speaks about race in 1000 meters. And these races as we have cited, were not included in the Olympic program.¹⁴

We should point to the athletes who had won most medals at these Games. Carl Schuhmann of Germany won the gold medal in wrestling and gymnastics. Similarly did his compatriot Fritz Hofmann who competed in athletics and

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¹² Serbian Gazette, March 29th, 1896 (the old calendar)
¹³ Olympic Games (London: "Dorling Kindersley", 2004), 253
¹⁴ Ch Anionis, Description of the Games (Athens: The Olympic Games 1896. IOC, 1896), II:61
gymnastics. He won two gold medals in gymnastics (team), and silver and bronze in athletics.\textsuperscript{15}

3.5. Sports results of Momcilo Tapavica

Youth and excellent physical abilities of Momcilo Tapavica enabled him, although he travelled at his own expense, to participate in the first Olympic Games. Versatile and naturally gifted, he was registered for competitions in several sports and sports disciplines, which was probably the interest of the national Olympic team of Hungary totalling 15 members, but at the same time it was a handicap for Momcilo Tapavica because several competitions were held the same day. In addition, different authors cite a variety of information about the sports that Momcilo Tapavica competed in. Of course, his performance and the success achieved in tennis, and his whole life showed that tennis was his favourite sport, but this is not noted anywhere.

According to the available data we can say that Momcilo Tapavica had been submitted for competition in the following sports disciplines:\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Wrestling
  \item Weightlifting
  \item Long jump;
  \item Pole vault;
  \item Shot put
  \item gymnastics;
  \item Tennis
\end{itemize}

Tuesday, 7 April, he should have had performed in three sports. Unfortunately, there was recorded just a story about his performance in weightlifting and winning the fifth place. Also it was noted that he was injured. About his performances in long jump and shot put there were no written records (at least for the time being). The reason for this is probably only the information on the first three places winners so that other competitors were not „important”.

On Wednesday, 8 April, 1896 (according to the new calendar), Momcilo Tapavica had a relatively quiet day. On that day he was reported only for

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. 253

\textsuperscript{16} Most authors mention his registration for wrestling, weightlifting, long jump, and shot put. Hrvoje Macanovic adds pole vault, and Milos Vranic claims that he was registered to compete in gymnastics as well. Registering and competing in tennis hasn’t been mentioned anywhere.
The first place was claimed by John Boland from the UK. Kaskadaglis Dionisios from Greece, who competed for Egypt, even though Egypt wasn’t listed as one of the countries competing, claimed the second place. This information can be found on the IOC website, with a reference to the previously mentioned Wallechinsky’s book.

The book *The Olympic Games*, 253, lists the gymnastics selection from Germany as the only medal winner in the team competition on high bar. The IOC website cites that the German team won the gold medal on high bar, and lists the names of 11 German gymnasts. There are no second or third place winners listed – which is a convenient subject to be researched further by the sports historians. It’s highly unlikely that there weren’t enough competitors, since there were three top places winners recorded in the parallel bars competition.

According to the research conducted by David Wallechinsky, as well as the Hungarian historians, the recorded results of the weightlifting competition were, mildly put, very strange. The gold medal winner was Vigo Jenssen from Denmark who lifted 115.5 kg. Elliot Launceston from the UK won the second place with the same result. The third place was claimed by the Greek athlete Sotiros Versos, who lifted 80 kg. However, D. Wallechinsky discovered that there were three more competitors who managed to lift 80 kg: MOMCIO TAPAVICA, Alexandros Nikopoulos from Greece and Carl Shumann from Germany. We can only guess as to why those three weren’t the third place winners as well.
organizers of these games, but also of the leaders of the Hungarian Olympic selections. It is obvious that in the foreground came achievements of teams whose executives tried to record and deliver them to those who have collected and presented them to the public. Whether the evidence came with deliberate or not deliberate errors remains a secret.

**Table 2.** Schedule of performances of Momčilo Tapavica at the games held in Athens in 1896

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<th>Mo 6</th>
<th>Tues. 7</th>
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At the time of the first Olympic Games and that is the end of the 19th century, tennis was a very popular sport and the club had developed the database locally and internationally. Among the best tennis players, there were professionals.
3.6. Controversy about the competition in tennis

Any discussion of the First Olympic Games is painted with various emotions, primarily positive, because it was the beginning of a renewal of the ancient idea of sport a) as a means to motivate young people to exercise and develop their physical or mental abilities, which can be used for different purposes, such as: health, the idea that - is always the best, National Defence; and b) as a means to bring together young people from all over the world, and thus closer to the ancient – to end all wars in the Olympic year, it took into account only the time at which the Games were held, and the fact that many did not understand that serious efforts were made by people from the International Olympic Committee. This confirms the relationship to the next few Olympic Games (before the First World War). They were mainly in the form of accompanying the exhibition of world events and so were enacting the economic function of advertising.

Today we are witnessing the fact that sport took the direction that was dictated. The Games were mainly in the form of exhibitions to related events worldwide and reflected social situation and social relations existing within particular cultures and civilizations and cultures which they belonged to.

And that resulted in both the Olympics and sport beginning to be used primarily for political and economic purposes.

Also, when analyzing the first Olympics one should take into account social as well as technological development of civilization at the end of the 19th century. Social and economic relations, as well as technological developments of the time had an impact on the organization of the first Olympic Games.

To this should be added the fact that the International Olympic Committee insisted on amateurism as a basic principle in selecting athletes who could participate at the Olympic Games. And if it is known that at that time sport began to spread, not only in Europe but also around the world, thanks to countries that have created their colonies around the world, then a clearer picture of the Olympic program, which sports, and how they were included in the Olympic program can be grasped.

We noted that the program announced 13 sports. Due to bad weather, or lack of interested teams and athletes, the competition was not held in four sports.

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30 The bad weather conditions were the reason as to why the First Olympic Games took an extra day to be closed. The competitions were scheduled to finish on April 14th, 1896, but due to the bad weather, the closing ceremony of the Games, on which the king of Greece gave a speech, was moved to April 15th. It was later made official. On the competition schedule, where all competitions
And it is easy to conclude, based on the fact that the program included nine sports. But still the question of whether tennis was included in program prepared by the International Olympic Committee still remains open. Maybe they were interested in athletes who were part of the Olympic team and were able to compete in tennis.

Among the best tennis players there were professionals. On the other hand, the fact is that among the names of athletes who competed in tennis, no names were known nor the name of the leader of the tennis sport. Their absence can be justified: (a) firstly by the fact that the best players were in a sense, professionals, and the Olympic Games were meant just for amateurs or those who were not engaged in sports in order to achieve some material gain, and (b) because then, as now, players (athletes) did not see a benefit, especially the material, and the opportunity for sports promotion - gaining points and the like. These are the reasons why the best players did not participate in these Olympic Games.

![Picture 3](image)

**Picture 3.** The original page from the text of Dr. P. Hančeia and Dr. T. Ivanic.

With this in mind and taking into account the research conducted by the Hungarian historians of sport Pal Hencsei, Tibor Ivanics, and Radovan Vukovic from Novi Sad, it can be concluded that the reason for the insufficient number of

where listed by days they were held on, it can be noted that there were no competitions scheduled for the penultimate day.

21 At the end of 19th century tennis was very developed, with France and England as the leading countries.

22 From the personal files of Radovan Vukovic, with the permission given by his spouse.
records of the results in tennis was the fact that tennis was not registered as an official sport at the first Olympics held in 1896 in Athens. It is therefore only indicated that the competition was held in tennis and quite poorly one gives the names of those who were the best.\textsuperscript{23}

Historians of sport that in the late 20 century agreed to gather in one place sports scores did not have an easy job. The result of their work are numerous books located in Lausanne, in the library of the Olympic museum. Thanks to their work today we can safely say that Momcilo Tapavica, a Serb, originating from Montenegro, won the third place in tennis and that the wrong committed against him and his sporting success - is finally corrected.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Momcilo Tapavica was naturally endowed with extraordinary psychophysical abilities. His capacity was improved and shaped by regular physical exercise thus creating such a versatile athlete. He lived at the time of such price and versatility when it was possible to show in sports and more sports competitions and sports.

However, although known and respected in every area where he lived and worked, many successes, especially sports ones, were tacit and were forgotten. It is precisely this fact that has led to research that we conducted. Taking into account the problem and purpose of this study, as well as the basic assumption from which we start - is the first Olympics held in Athens in 1896 where Momcilo Tapavica won the 3rd place in tennis and this helped this research to be directed at precisely defined direction. And based on everything that we have presented in the form of a conclusion, to point out a few facts.

Momcilo Tapavica was born in Nadalj, a small town near Novi Sad, Serbia, in 10/26/1872. His ancestors were originally from Montenegro, and to this little village they came in 1776. In Nadalj he attended elementary school, high school in Novi Sad, and he studied in Budapest. He has always been an excellent pupil and student. He has graduated from the Budapest Technical University, department of construction. Immediately upon the completion of studies he began to design and build. He died in Pula 10th January 1949 where he was buried.

\textsuperscript{23} In The Olympic Museum in Lausanne there are 13 books written from 1992 to 1999 that contain all the results and relevant information on the First Olympic Games. The official records of National Olympics Committee in 1996 also list Momcilo Tapavica as the third place winner in tennis.
He took up sport in high school. He was among the best and the most versatile athletes in high school and college.

He was a quiet and withdrawn young man and an excellent athlete. He was a member of the exercise club – called National exercise club. Its versatility was demonstrated by winning first place in: long jump, high jump, shot put, pole vault. He was a great wrestler and weightlifter, and he proved to be excellent in tennis as well.

In the first new Olympic Games held in Athens in 1896 Momčilo Tapavica had been reported to compete in seven sports: wrestling, weightlifting, long jump, pole vault, shot put, gymnastics and tennis.

So far following results were known: fourth place in free style wrestling, and fifth place in weight lifting with both hands. This research confirmed his result achieved in tennis- he won the third place.

His performances and achievements in other sports disciplines, for now, are not known. It is assumed that the team, in gymnastics, took second place. But this assumption requires new research.

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НАСТУП МОМЧИЛА ТАПАВИЦЕ НА ПРВИМ ОЛИМПИЈСКИМ ИГРАМА ОДРЖАНИМ У АТИНИ 1896. ГОДИНЕ
Олимпијска прича о правди и неправди

САЖЕТАК
Момчило Тапавица рођен је у Надаљу малом месту у Војводини, у Србији, а уучествовао је на првим Олимпијским играма у Атини 1896. Он се такмично као члан Олимпијске репрезентације Мађарске. Истраживање је показало да се као свестран спортиста такмично у неколико спортских дисциплиних. Али његови резултати у тенису су још увек у сенци и представљају тајну јер се његово име не налази међу победницима. Налаз овог истраживања су усмерени на то да се бар долинично, реши ово питање и представљају покушај да се утврди права истина и на тај начин компензира олимпијска неправда према њему.

Кључне речи: Момчило Тапавица, тенис, неправда

ПОЯВЛЕНИЕ МОМЧИЛА ТАПАВИЦИ НА ОЛИМПИЈСКИХ ИГРАХ В АФИНАХ В 1896. ГОДУ

РЕЗЮМЕ
Момчило Тапавица родио се у Надаљу, неболшом поселку у Војводини (Србији), и примао је уучествовао у првим Олимпијским играма, које проводили су у Афинах у 1896. години. Он соревновао се као члан Олимпијске објане Венгрије. Исследовање показало је да он хотя је такмичио као универзални спортиста примао је учество у неколико дисциплина. Его резултати у тенису је још увек у сенци и представљају тајну јер се његово име не налази међу победницима. Резултате овог истраживања направили су на тај начин тако што је исправно и компензира несправедливост по отношеним и његовим доосужењима.

Ключеве слова: Момчило Тапавица, тенис, несправедливост