

## Gymnastics to a perfect score – ‘Nadia Comăneci Year 2026’

There are countries that revere their sporting idols in ways we can scarcely imagine. Romania is one such country, where the year 2026 has been officially declared ‘Nadia Comăneci Year’ by Parliament and by decree of the President. This honours the 50th anniversary of her historic triumph at the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal, where the Romanian gymnast became the first in the history of the sport to receive the dream score and highest mark of ‘10.0’ – older readers may well remember this. Fifty years on, the *\*Allgemeine Deutsche Zeitung – für Rumänien\** sums it up once again.

*“It was 18 July 1976. A petite fourteen-year-old took to the uneven bars. Her sequence of somersaults and twists, crowned by a flawless dismount, lasted just 19 seconds – and yet went down in history. The electronic scoreboard displayed ‘**COMANECI NADIA, ROMANIA**’, then the number 73, her start number, and where her score should have appeared, it read: 1.00. This was not a mistake, but a technical glitch. The scoreboards were not designed to display the maximum mark of 10.0, which had until then been considered unattainable.”*

**At the time, the Romanian gymnast** didn’t immediately realise the score on the scoreboard; her mind was already on the next apparatus.



When her coach, Béla Károlyi, came up to her, she asked him: ‘Professor, is it really a ten?’ – “His smile spread from ear to ear and he said ‘yes’,” recalls the now 64-year-old exceptional gymnast with nostalgia, who went on to win a total of five gold, three silver and one bronze medal at the 1976 and 1980 Olympic Games.

**For many people in Romania**, this moment was more than just a sporting event. As the images were broadcast around the world, a feeling emerged that went far beyond that: an unexpected new sense of pride in their own country – in a climate characterised at the time by political repression. Nadia Comăneci became a role model with whom an entire nation could identify. With grace, precision and a technical virtuosity previously unseen, she took centre stage on the world stage and set new standards.

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They own the Bart Conner Gymnastics Academy as well as several sports shops and are the publishers of the magazine *\*International Gymnast\**. They are also both involved in charitable work. The couple have one son and live in Norman, Oklahoma. In 2001, Comăneci became a US citizen. Ten years ago, in an interview, she described herself as “a Romanian who was adopted by the USA”.

***The Romanians adore her*** – even decades after her great sporting triumphs. The programme of events for the “Nadia Comăneci Year 2026” includes a grand festive gala in Bucharest, the presentation of the Grand Cross of the Romanian Order of the Star by the President, and the issue of two further philatelic products by the Romanian Post Office.



The two stamps and sheets depict moments from the balance beam and floor exercises during the Olympic competition on 18 July 1976. Her competition number ‘073’, the ‘1.00’ on the scoreboard and the ‘50th Olympic Anniversary’ are shown in UV-visible ink.

***The first-day cover*** features the ‘Nadia Comăneci, Montreal Monument’, which is located near the gymnastics hall in Onești, where Nadia Comăneci trained as a young athlete. Thanks in part to this famous gymnastics legend and numerous sporting events, Onești has been awarded the title of ‘European City of Sport 2026’ this year.



**Nadia Comăneci** is probably the only female Olympic champion in the world to have been honoured by her country of birth's postal service during her lifetime with a wealth of commemorative stamps and other philatelic issues ...



– as shown on the first-day issued to mark her 60th birthday on 12 November 2021.

\*Sources: Romfilatelia, Allgemeine Deutsche Zeitung, Wikipedia)  
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