

Stanisław Zaborniak

Department of History and Physical Culture,  
Faculty of Physical Education, University of Rzeszow (Poland)

## SOCIAL RANGE IN TRADITION OF ATHLETICS IN POLAND IN 1919-1939<sup>41</sup>

The official birth of athletics in Poland is connected with regaining the independence after 1918 and is related to 11<sup>th</sup> October 1919. The date is associated with a historic moment which was the establishment of the Polish Association of Athletics in Cracow. The first chairman of the PZLA [*a Polish abbreviation for the Polish Association of Athletics*] was Tadeusz Kuchar. The PZLA was the first sports association that was set up in the II Republic of Poland. Along with its establishment the first organisational framework of athletics was formed, international contacts were initiated, and it became a member of the International Association of Athletics Federation – IAAF.



Dr Stanisław Polakiewicz, in 1914 year, the first advisor of AZLA into Galicia, on 11 October 1919 r. in Krakow participant of founding Congress of PZLA, in years 1919–1921, II Vice-president of *Polish Association of Athletics* (PZLA).

Throughout the interwar period an intensive organisational and sports development was on in the field of athletics. Already in 1919 by a decision of the national authorities physical education departments were set up at the Ministry of Education, Health and Public Work as well as at other central institutions. Regardless to the lack of base, equipment and staff (PE teachers, instructors, coaches) the old clubs were reactivated and the new sections of athletics were set up all over the country. Athletics soon caught on, especially in the cities where the sports tradition had existed before. They were centres in Warsaw, Lvov, Cracow, Poznań and Łódź. The first competitors and activists were pre war amateurs of athletics. After a year of the PZLA existence there were 11 clubs, and in 1926 there were 126, in 1931 – 210, and in 1938 already 238. In 1922, in the PZLA there were 6 district associations (OZLA) [*OZLA – District Association of Athletics*] in 1937 the number rose to 12, the number of clubs increased to 326, and there were almost 9 thousand of competitors.

<sup>41</sup> Pracę zrealizowano w ramach działalności statutowej Wydziału Wychowania Fizycznego Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego – projekt URWWF/S/07/001 finansowany przez Ministerstwo Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego. (znaków 28 592).



Tadeusz Kuchar – first President of *Polish Association of Athletics (PZLA 1919–1922)*

At the time, the level of Polish athletics improved which at the beginning of the described period was shaped by the Lvov district to be transferred, during the state strengthening, to Warsaw, Poznań, Pomeranian and Silesian districts. When it comes to the sports level of female competition the Łódź district was the next after the ones mentioned and in the male competition the Vilnius one. Development of athletics in Poland was much influenced by such organisations as: TG ‘Sokół’ [*the Gymnastic Association ‘Falcon’*], the Shooting Association ‘Shooter’, AZSs [*The Academic Associations of Sport*], the Polish Scouts’ Association, Catholic Youths Association, and other less significant organisations such as: the Railway Civil Defence Training and the Postal Civil Defence Training.



Major Tomasz Krzyski – President of board of *Polish Association of Athletics (PZLA)* in 1924.

Financial means to support the activity of athletics came from the PUWF and PW subventions, from the authorities’ grants, from sponsors and from its own income. Activity of the PZLA could develop first of all due to the national subventions and special grants from the PUWF and PW, the Ministry of Military Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the

Ministry of Religion and Public Enlightenment. The means were devoted to preparations for international matches and Olympic Games.



Kazimiera Muszał, member of Women's Affairs Commission of PZLA .

Throughout a 20-year period, athletics facilities in the II Republic of Poland grew from 2 in 1920 to 562 in 1939. They were erected due to the subventions of the PUWF and PW, municipal authorities' funds, but also thanks to the intense involvement of the military circles and social organisations i.e. AZS [*the Academic Association of Sport*], TG 'Sokół' [*the Gymnastic Association 'Falcon'*], the Railway Civil Defence Training. The Ukrainian minorities had their athletics facilities in Lvov and Przemyśl, and the Jewish minority had its facilities in most of the Polish cities.



Ludwik Christelbauer, athletics activist LKS „Pogoń” Lwów, member of the athletic board of PZLA – the first Federal PZLA team captain, a longtime member of the honorary Committee of PZLA

***I Rocznik Sportowy 1918–1925, M. Orłowicz, Warszawa 1925.***

The training staff played an undeniable role in the development of athletics in Poland. Training of the PZLA's staff in the initial stage of an athletics' organising process in Poland was in hands of the foreign coaches: K. H. Helgeson (1920), H. Hantwarght (1922–1923), M. Baguet (1922–1925), T. Nohrling (1926–1927), S. Jacobson (1928), A. Klumberg – Kolompere (1927–1933), and later Polish ones: A. Cejzik, S. Petkiewicz, Z. Heliasz, brothers Józef and Jan Baran-Bilewskis and others. A significant role in the growing number of the training staff was played by the Polish universities: Jagiellonian University in Cracow

(training run from 1920), the Military School of Gymnastics and Sport in Poznań (from 1922) and from 1929 the Central Institute of Physical Education and later the Marshal Piłsudski's Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw.

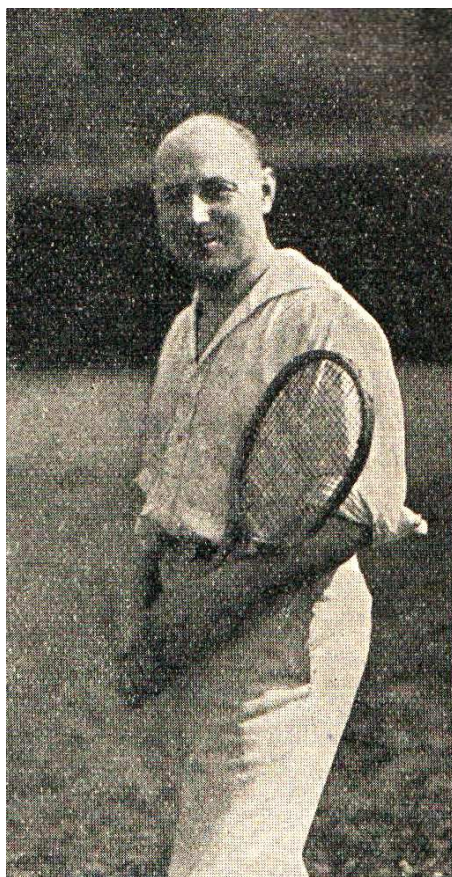


Kpt. Jerzy Misiński, in the years 1926-1930  
President of PZLA, „Stadjon” 1927, № 6, p. 12.

Activity of the Health Commission at the Academic Board of Physical Education had a significant impact. It is due to its motions that the academic activity evolved, and at the developing sports and medical clinics sportsmen's health care was spreading. At the end of the studied period in Poland there were about 75 sports and medical clinics, and a team of dr J. Mydlarski drew up an internationally acknowledged criterion of physical fitness.

The level of athletics' development was much influenced by publishing houses and publications appearing in 1919–1939, their thematic scope and character was methodological and informative. Among others, one should pay attention to magazines which played a role of the PZLA's units, at first the Lvovian *Sport* (1919–1924) and then *Stadjon* (till 1934), a Cracovian mutation of *the Daily Courier Illustrated* which was being issued under the title *One, Two, Three*, and the Varsovian *Sports Review*.





Wacław Znajdowski in 1930–1939 years  
President of PZLA

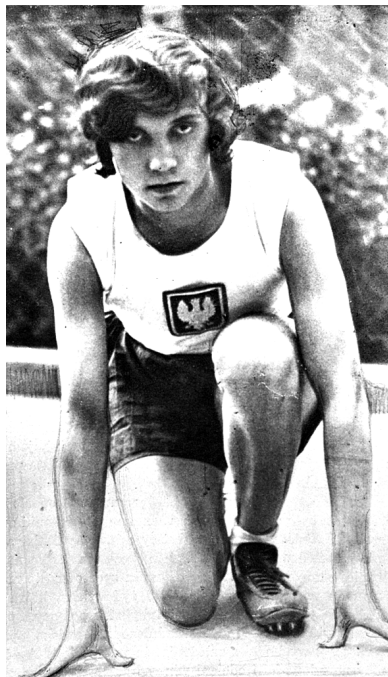
On a basis of the analysis of archival sources, press reports, and source publications covering the adopted time frame and territorial range the study reveals a number of mechanisms which had an influence on sport including athletics in Poland.

Athletics in Poland in 1918–1939 was central to development of physical culture among Polish society. Its vast popularity reached numerous groups of young people associated in many social organisations i.e.: the Academic Association of Sport, the Gymnastic Association ‘Sokół’ [*Falcon*], in the paramilitary organisations the Shooting Association ‘Strzelec’ [*Shooter*], the Railway Civil Defence Training, the Postal Civil Defence Training, in the national uniformed services i.e.: police and military sports clubs, in the fitness programme of the Polish Scouting Association, and also in the clubs: the Young Men’s and Women’s Catholic Associations, Polish YMCA, the Rural Youth’s Association, and the Folk Youth’s Association ‘Wici’. This discipline was the main part in the curriculum of physical education in schools. It was also present in the activity and gymnastic and sports associations of German, Ukrainian and Jewish minorities which were present in Poland after 1918.



Halina Konopacka AZS Warszawa.

Very often, famous male and female athletes were taking their first steps in the mentioned organisations, among others: Halina Konopacka [*the Academic Association of Sports*] AZS Warszawa, the first gold medallist in discus throw at the Olympic Games in Amsterdam in 1928, J. Wajs [*the Gymnastic Association 'Falcon'*] TG 'Sokół' Pabianice, a brown and silver medallist in discus throw at the Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 1932 and in Berlin in 1936, Stanisława Walasiewicz [*the Gymnastic Association 'Falcon-Grażyna'*] TG 'Sokół-Grażyna' Warszawa, a gold and silver medallist in the 100 m sprint at the Olympics in Los Angeles in 1932 and in Berlin in 1936, Janusz Kusociński a gold medallist in the 10 000 m sprint at the Olympics in Los Angeles, whose first steps were taken in the Workers' Sports Club 'Sarmata' Warsaw, and many more Polish representatives among others: Józef Noji who started his career in the Gymnastic Association TG 'Sokół'.



Stanisława Walasiewicz Olympic gold medalist  
1932 in Los Angeles in 100 m sprint

Due to its popularity in the mentioned organisations, athletics was practised on a massive scale. It was treated as a way of developing physical fitness, as a competitive sport in specialised sports clubs. Among mass organisations the highest sports level was represented by athletics in the Gymnastic Association TG 'Sokół', in the athletics section of AZS and KPW, and among men representatives of the AZS, KPW and WKS.

During the II Republic of Poland, athletics was the most popular in the oldest Polish sports organisation TG 'Sokół' which during the interwar period had in its structures about 200 athletics sections. The most successful female athletes were J. Wajs TG 'Sokół' Pabianice and S. Walasiewicz TG 'Sokół-Grażyna' Warsaw, who established 14 world records, 43 Polish records, and together with other female athletes from the 'Falcon' they got 59 titles of Polish champions. Apart from the mentioned Olympic medals of S. Walasiewicz TG 'Sokół-Grażyna' Warszawa and J. Wajs TG „Sokół” Pabianice other Polish champions were: Wiera Czajkowska TG 'Sokół' Warszawa in the 250 m sprint (1925), and in the long jump (1924), Maria Felska TG 'Sokół' Grudziądz in the 80 m hurdle race (1937), and in the high jump (1937), Klara Gackowska TG 'Sokół' Grudziądz in the discus throw (1938), Jolanta Henclewska TG 'Sokół' Warszawa in the 600 g javelin (1925), Alina Hulanicka TG 'Sokół-Grażyna' Warsaw three times in the 60 m sprint (1928–1930) and once in the 100 m sprint (1928) and twice in the high jump (1930 and 1931), Jadwiga Janowska TG 'Sokół' Pabianice twice in the high jump (1929–1930), Marta Lubecka TG 'Sokół-Grażyna' in the long jump (1929), Stefania Paruszevska TG 'Sokół' Warsaw in the 800 g javelin (1924), Wacława Sadkowska TG 'Sokół' Warsaw in the 60 m sprint (1925) and once in the 65 m hurdle race (1925) and in the long jump (1925), Antonina Taborowicz TG 'Sokół-Grażyna' Warsaw three times in the high jump (1924–1926), Jadwiga Wajs TG 'Sokół' Pabianice, Poznań and Łódź three times in the high jump (1933, 1935 and 1936), three times in the 4 kg shot put (1934–1936), five times in the 1 kg discus throw (1932–1937), Stanisława Walasiewicz TG 'Sokół-Grażyna' twice in the 60 m sprint (1934 and 1935), twice in the 100 m sprint (1934 and 1935), twice in the 200 m sprint (1934 and 1935), and Józefa Witkowska TG 'Sokół' Warszawa in the 60 m sprint (1924).



Jadwiga Wajs, medalist Olympic Games 1932 in Los Angeles and Olympic Games 1936 in Berlin in the discus throw

The athletes from the Gymnastic Association 'Sokół' [*Falcon*] during competitions in 1919–1939 established 24 Polish records, and individually, they were Polish champions



twenty times. Among representatives of the athletics section of the TG 'Sokół' titles of Polish champions belonged to: Brunon Miałkas TG 'Sokół' Poznań in the 10000 m sprint (1930), Stanisław Bartkowiak TG 'Sokół' Poznań in the marathon (1931), Julian Kluk TG 'Sokół' Lvov in the pole vault (1932), Jerzy Kordas TG 'Sokół' Bydgoszcz in the hammer throw (1939), Władysław Mikrut TG 'Sokół' Koronowo in javelin (1930), Franciszek Mikrut TG 'Sokół' Koronowo twice in javelin (1931 and 1939), Antoni Morończyk TG 'Sokół' Lvov in the pole vault (1935), Zbigniew Tilgner TG 'Sokół' Poznań in the shot put (1939) and in the discus throw (1933), Antoni Węglarczyk TG 'Sokół' Chorzów three times in the hammer throw (1936–1938) and Alojzy Więckowski TG 'Sokół' Bydgoszcz four times in the hammer throw (1929, 1933–1935).

Not less impressive number of successes was enjoyed by female and male athletes from the clubs of the Academic Associations of Sport in Cieszyn, Gdańsk, Cracow, Lublin, Lvov, Poznań, Vilnius, and Warsaw. The most outstanding was Halina Konopacka, an athlete from the Warsaw AZS who was the first to get the gold medal for Poland in the discus throw at the Olympic Games in Amsterdam in 1928. During the Polish championships in 1922–1939 female athletes from the AZS got 39 titles of Polish champions, and male athletes won 105 times at the Polish championships in 1920–1939. Moreover, the AZS female athletes had 40 times better results than the Polish records, and the male athletes as much as 50 times better (excluding relay races).



Maria Kwaśniewska, bronzer medalist in javelin in Olympic Games 1936 year in Berlin.



Among female representatives of the AZS clubs titles of Polish champions in 1922–1939 were held by: Alina Dunin AZS Poznań in the long jump (1935), Hanna Jabłczyńska AZS Warsaw in the long jump (1926), Wanda Jasińska AZS Poznań in the 4 kg shot put (1931–1933), Halina Konopacka AZS Warsaw in the high jump (1928), in the 5 kg shot put (1924–1925), the 3,628 kg shot put (1925), the 4 kg shot put (1926–1928), in the 4 kg shot put with both hands (1927–1928), in the 1,5 kg discus throw (1924–1925), in the 1 kg discus throw (1926–1928, 1930–1931), the 1 kg discus throw with both hands (1927–1928), the 800 g javelin (1926), the 600 g javelin (1930), Jolanta Manteufl AZS Warsaw in the 60 m sprint (1931), the 100 m sprint (1931), in the high jump (1931), Jadwiga Nowacka AZS Warsaw in the 800 m sprint (1933, 1936), Barbara Pawska AZS Warsaw (1922), Felicja Schabińska AZS Warsaw (1933), Irena Świdorska AZS Poznań in the 800 m sprint (1932, 1934–1935), Zofia Wieczorkiewicz AZS Warsaw in the 1 000 m sprint (1926) and Helena Woynarowska AZS Warsaw in the 60 and 100 m sprints (1926).

Among male athletes representing the AZS champion's title had: Stefan Adamczak AZS Warsaw and AZS Poznań in the pole vault (1923–1925, 1927–1931), decathlon (1925), Józef Baran AZS Poznań in the discus throw (1929), Ludwik Chełmicki AZS Warsaw in the 110 m hurdle race (1923), Roman Danowski AZS Lvov (1939), Władysław Dobrowolski AZS Warsaw: in the 100 m sprint (1926 i 1927), the 200 m sprint (1926), the 110 m hurdle race (1927), the long jump (1925), javelin (1929), Julian Gruner AZS Warsaw in the high jump (1922), javelin (1925–1926), Mieczysław Haspel AZS Lvov in the 110 m hurdle race (1935, 1937), Marian Hoffman AZS Poznań in the long jump (1937), in the triple jump (1937), Karol Hoffman AZS Poznań in the long jump (1938–1939), in the high jump (1937–1938), in the triple jump (1936 and 1938), Józef Jaworski AZS Warsaw in the 800 m sprint (1924), 1 500 m sprint (1923 and 1929) and 3 000 m sprint (1924), Władysław Klemczak AZS Poznań (1936), Stefan Kostrzewski AZS Warsaw in sprints: the 110 m hurdle race (1926), five times in the 800 m sprint (1925–1929), seven times in the 400 m hurdle race (1924–1929 and 1934), Kazimierz Kuźmicki AZS Warsaw in the 1 500 m sprint (1932), Feliks Malanowski AZS Warsaw in the 1 500 m sprint (1928), Czesław Mierzejewski AZS Warsaw in the high jump (1928), Józef Milicz AZS Warsaw in the marathon (1929), Zdzisław Nowak AZS Cracow in the long jump (1928–1930), Stefan Piątkowski AZS Warsaw in the 100 m sprint (1922) and in the 200 m sprint (1922), Jerzy Pławczyk AZS Warsaw in the high jump (1932, 1934–1935), Janusz Rey pentathlon (1924), Antoni Rzepka AZS Lvov in the pole vault (1926), Stanisław Sulikowski AZS Warsaw in the 110 m hurdle race (1938), Sławosz Szydłowski AZS Warsaw in the discus throw (1923–1925), in javelin (1924), Edward Trojanowski AZS Warsaw in the 100 m sprint (1931 and 1932), the 200 m sprint (1931), in javelin (1932), Wojciech Trojanowski AZS Warsaw in the 110 m hurdle race (1929), in the high jump (1926, 1929), in the triple jump (1930), Jan Tęšiorowski AZS Poznań in the 100 m sprint (1934), and Zygmunt Weiss AZS Warsaw in the 400 m sprint (1924).



Janusz Kusociński golden medalist of Olympic Games 1932 in Los Angeles in 10 000 m run

From the military circles in 1937 there were 24 Military Sports Clubs registered in the PZLA [*the Polish Association of Athletics*]. The most efficient in 1920–1925 were: KS ‘Pentatlon’ Poznań where a many-time champion from Poland Stefan Adamczak was practising, WKS Dęblin, whose members under a leadership of the Polish representative, champion and record holder – Wacław Gąssowski twice (1937 and 1938) gained the title of a Polish team champion, an important athletics section in Poland in the 30s of the interwar period was to be found in the WKS ‘Legia’ Warsaw represented by the female athletes such as: a hurdler Felicja Schabińska a Polish champion in 1930-1933 in the 80 m hurdle race, Wacław Gąssowski, a Polish champion (1937) in the 800 m sprint, Józef Noji in 1935-1939 a Polish champion in the 5000 m sprint (5) and in 1936 in the 10 000 m sprint (1), Antoni Maszewski, a Polish champion in 1935-1938 in the 400 m hurdle race, and Zygmunt Siedlecki, a Polish champion in 1934 in the discus throw.

Apart from the military club sections, athletics as a way of physical practice in a form of daily exercises and tests was used in all military units in the Second Republic of Poland. A popular form of using athletics in the military units were athletics pentathlons among officers and soldiers, supplemented with a grenade throw and a rifle shooting for soldiers and a gun shooting for officers.



1928 r. III Polish policeman's sport games, S. Kartasiński,  
the discus throw, „Stadjon” 1928, № 38, p. 11.

Similar application of athletics was to be found in the police, where it was used as a way of improving and sustaining physical fitness essential in performing duties. As indicated by the activity reports of the PZLA in 1937, in its structure there were 7 competitive athletics sections. Moreover, at every police station, annually, high officers and policemen took fitness tests, which apart from shooting practice included important athletics competitions i.e.: races, jumps and throws. Some of the leading athletes from the police circles were: a hurdler and a decathlete Tadeusz Hanke PKS Warsaw, a four-time representative of Poland, a three-time champion of Poland in the long jump, pentathlon, and the 4x400m relay, a thrower Stanisław Kartasiński PKS Warsaw, a two-time finalist of the Polish championships in the hammer throw, a middle-distance runner Edmund Kędzia PKS Warsaw a member of the champion 4x400 m relay team, a two-time finalist of the Polish championships, a brown medallist of the Polish championships in the 3x800m relay, a hurdler

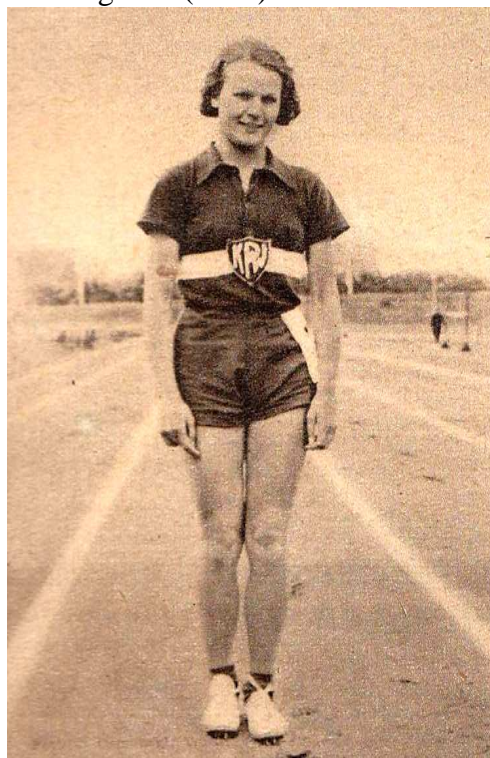
Stefan Kisieliński PKS Katowice, a sprinter Tadeusz Kołaczkowski PKS Warsaw a Polish champion in the Olympic relay in 1937 and an indoor Polish champion in the 6x50 m relay in 1935, a middle-distance runner Kazimierz Kosiarz, a sprinter Marian Kwiatkowski PKS Warsaw an indoor Polish champion of the 6x50m relay, Bolesław Lech PKS Katowice a Polish record holder in the 25 km race, Józef Milicz PKS Warszawa a Polish champion in marathon (1929 r.) and a Polish record holder in the 20 km race, Stefan Pruszkowski PKS Warsaw a three-time Polish record holder in the 10x100 m, 3x1000 m and 4x1500 m relays, Henryk Roguski PKS Katowice a two-time medallist of Polish championships in the 50 km walking race, a sprinter and a jumper Stefan Sikorski PKS Warszawa a seventeen-time Polish representative, a nineteen-time Polish record holder and a many times champion of Poland, a decathlete and a hurdler Antoni Sobik PKS Katowice a two-time Polish vice-champion in the 400m hurdle race, Antoni Suchodolski PKS Łuck an indoor Polish champion in the shot put, and others.

A significant popularity of athletics was to be found in the activity of the paramilitary organisations the Shooting Association ‘Strzelec’ [*Shooter*], the Railway Civil Defence Training, and the Postal Civil Defence Training. Among 30 athletics sections of the ZS ‘Strzelec’ registered in the PZLA in 1938 the most significant male and female athletes were:

Teodor Bieregowej-Bieregowski ZS 'Strzelec' Lublin (1931-1937), a participant of the Olympic Games in Berlin, a three-time Polish record holder in the 20 km walking race (2) and the 50 km walking race (1) a many times Polish champion in race walking, Brunon Czech ZS 'Strzelec' Katowice a Polish champion in the 10km walking race (1938), Marian Flis ZS 'Strzelec' Lublin a Polish champion in the 3 000 m obstacle race, Grajda ZS 'Strzelec' Warsaw a Polish champion in the 50 km walking race (1933), Maksymilian Krzyczkowski 'Strzelec' Warsaw a Polish record holder in the 80 km walking race, Kazimierz Powierza a two-time Polish champion in the 50 km walking race (1931, 1932), Jan Śliwiński ZS 'Strzelec' Ostrów a Polish champion in the 50 km walking race (1938).



1937 r. Grzegorz Dunecki KPW Toruń, winner in the 100 m and long jump during the championships KPW, „Raz Dwa Trzy” 1937, № 40, p. 16.



1937 r. Książkiewicz KPW „Pomorzanin” Toruń, XVI Polish champion in 60 m and 100 m sprint, „Raz Dwa Trzy” 1937, № 29, p. 16.

Since the KPW and PPW were established in the structures of these organisations athletics was a discipline used as a keep-fit form. At the end of the studied period, in 1939 there were 11 KPW's and 1 PPW's athletics sections registered in the PZLA. Apart from the 12 mentioned ones, despite the KPW and PPW team members did not participate in sports competitions, their members systematically joined individual athletics events.

In the interwar period, athletics was dynamically developing in the workers' sports clubs. As a result of finance deficiencies, from the 400 clubs operating in 7 district and 4 subdistrict sections associated in the ZRSS in the PZLA there were just 16 registered athletics sections. Except for the sports beginnings of Janusz Kusociński at the RKS 'Sarmata', from the workers' sports movement originated: Stanisław Przybyłko RKS 'Skra' Warsaw a Polish champion in marathon (1935), Janina Wencel RKS 'Skra' Warsaw a Polish champion in the long jump (1936, 1937).

In the programmes of the Polish Scouting Association, athletics played a role connected with realisation of physical education programme. It was present in all keep-fit programmes. Besides, in 4 Polish scouting clubs there were athletics sections registered in the PZLA. Similar utilitarian and recreational function of athletics was to be found in a number of associations, the Young Men's and Women's Catholic Associations.



A proof of athletics' universality in the activity of the mentioned organisations could be found in the 27<sup>th</sup> July 1939 report of the Young Men's Catholic Association which claimed that athletics was practised by 8 811 men and 2 794 women. At the end of 1937, there 10 KSMM [*a Polish abbreviation for the Young Men's Catholic Association*] sections registered in the PZLA.

In education units athletics was a part of obligatory physical education curriculum. Students could practise it only at the School Sports Clubs (SKS), and since 1927 in the Interschool Sports Clubs. In 1919-1939 participation in the after school athletics classes was forbidden. That kind of stand had been taken by MWR and OP in the interwar period and was eased slowly until 1937 when, due to influence of the public opinion and the press students' participation in the club athletics competitions was reluctantly tolerated. In many cases, students who participated in the competitions were forced to use pseudonyms. In 1937, in Poland in Sieraków an athletics training camp for talented juniors was organised for the first time and was concluded with the championships of Poland.

Among national minorities, athletes from the Jewish sports organisations were exceeding when it comes to the sports and organisational level, and at the end of 1937 they had 31 organisations registered in the PZLA. Among Jewish female athletes a significant position in the Polish arena was held by: Maryla Freiwald 'Makkabi' Kraków a Polish champion in the 80m hurdle race (1928, 1929, 1934, 1935, 1936) and the long jump and the standing long jump (1927), Irena Hornstein 'Hasmonea' Lvov a Polish champion in the 800m sprint (1937), Sonia Lewin-Szmukler ŻKS 'Makabi' Vilnius a Polish record holder in the shot put (1927, 1929, twice in 1930), a Polish champion in the shot put (1930), Maria Rittner a record holder in javelin (1925), and among men Karol Czyż (Czysz) 'Makabi' Cracow a seven-time representative of the PZLA in the international events.



1927 r. a group of leading Polish athlete women team, among which the Jewish athletes, standing from left: Rittner „Makkabi”, Jabłczyńska, H. Konopacka AZS Warszawa, Schabińska i Czajkowska from „Legia” Warszawa, Brliner „Makkabi”, „Jasna” „Cracovia” and Freiwald AZS Warszawa, kneeling from left: Lanż AZS Poznań, Kasprzak and Gędziorowska.

All mass organisations popularising athletics were running courses for instructors and coaches, building athletics facilities, and were involved in the activity directed towards organisation of sports and mass competitions.

The greatest number of athletics followers in Poland in the interwar period had the sports clubs whose number grew from 11 since the PZLA was established in 1919 to 326 when the II World War broke up and these clubs together with the 50 clubs not connected with the Association made up 376 clubs, some sources claim that there were more than 400 clubs. Approximately there were 200 competitors in 1919 and the number grew to 18 311 in 1939. As a result, athletics was the second most popular sport in Poland after football when it comes to the number of active participants.



Referees in athletics games of Gymnastic Association "Falcon" (TG „Sokół”) in Jarosław,  
(from S. Zaborniak collection)

The 20's were characterised by an intensified propaganda of athletics development. It was connected with an aspiration to increase sports and organisational level of athletics. The means of propaganda were all sorts of competitions organised at different levels. The most spectacular and popular were simple and available cross-country and street races. The races influenced other athletics events, enabling more frequent organisation of competitions including the whole range of events.

Regained independence after a long period of the Partitions of Poland eased a hindrance to a rhythmical social development including physical education and sport. Athletics due to its national meaning – utilitarian one and international – of propaganda value for Poland and the Poles in the interwar period constituted a significant social developmental stage. Regardless to a finance deficiency of the country and a number of socio-political factors present in the II Republic of Poland, athletics, being connected with military and propaganda factors, was one of few disciplines supported by the country's authorities. From 1919 athletics activists directed their efforts towards athletics popularisation among Polish society. To achieve it numerous sports events were organised in and outside the country. This organisational activity was supported by the clubs associated in the PZLA, social associations and organisations: TG 'Sokół' [*the Gymnastic Association 'Falcon'*], Polish Scouting



Association, academic and military circles, including the Shooting Association 'Strzelec' ['Shooter'], and the WKS, paramilitary ones (PPW and KPW) and the National Police.



1926 r. Private Gawlik, who walking 400 km from Krakow to Sulejówek in 5 days, melding Marshall Piłsudski doubling the ranks of army in Krakow. „Stadjon” 1926, № 13, p. 1.

The first movement to include Polish athletes in the international sports events were the preparations to participate in the Olympic Games in Antwerp in 1920. Due to the Soviets' invasion of Poland in 1920 the PZLA's representatives as well as representatives of other sports disciplines did not participated in the Games. In the first international competition organized by the PZLA in 1921 representatives of the Czech Republic, Estonia and France took part. The first official, international competition of the PZLA's representatives was a three-cornered match of the Slavic countries which was organised in Prague 6<sup>th</sup> August 1922 including athletes from Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. The Poles suffered a heavy defeat. After a four-year break in 1926, in the next international match with the Yugoslavian athletes the PZLA's representatives achieved their first international, historic, team victory.

In 1922-1939 the PZLA's male representatives took part in 38 meetings, from which the most significant victories were those over strong teams of France and Norway in 1938 and numerous victories with the Slavic countries. In the interwar period the male athletics representation of the PZLA played 38 matches, 9 of them were three-cornered matches, which makes a total of 47 matches in pairs. The summary of the competition including a separate three-cornered matches' scoring looked as follows: out of 47 meetings Polish athletes won 29 times, lost 17 times and drew once. In the interwar period Polish athletes did not manage to defeat Austrian, German nor Hungarian representatives.

In 1919-1939 Polish athletes participated in the Olympics four times: in Paris in 1924, Amsterdam in 1928, Los Angeles in 1932, and in Berlin in 1936. During the mentioned Olympics only J. Kusociński KS 'Warszawianka' won the gold medal in the 10 000m sprint in Los Angeles in 1932. Apart from him, other significant and victorious participants in the international and European meetings were: Z. Heljasz a record holder in the shot put, a 400m hurdler S. Kostrzewski AZS Warszawa, middle-distance runners: K. Kucharski 'Pogoń' Lvov

and S. Petkiewicz KS 'Warszawianka', a long-distance runner – J. Noji WKS 'Legia' Warsaw, in the triple jump – E. Luckhaus KS 'Jagiellonia' Białystok, decathletes: W. Gierutto 'Warszawianka', A. Cejzik KS 'Polonia' Warsaw, Z. Siedlecki KS 'Legia', in the pole vault W. Schneider 'Pogoń' Katowice and A. Morończyk 'Warszawianka' and in the high jump J. Pławczyk AZS Warsaw. Polish athletes initiated their participation in the European Championships in 1934. In the first championships they won two medals: the silver one by J. Kusociński 'Warszawianka' in the 5 000 m sprint and the brown one by J. Pławczyk AZS Warsaw in the high jump. In the team scoring the Poles were on the IX place. In the next, second championships organised in 1938 in Paris, Polish athletes won only one medal – the silver one by J. Pławczyk in the high jump. In the team scoring the PZLA representation was classified together with Belgium at X-XI place.



1931; Paris, a group of runners before the start of the race at 5000 m in the Memorial of Jane Bouin, J. Kusociński first from the right, a Frenchman - Rochard sixth from the left, „Raz Dwa Trzy” 1931, № 29, p. 6.

The PZLA's male athletics team in the studied period did not play any significant role in the World or European classification. However, after 1919 throughout 20 years from the lowest ranked countries Poland with its male athletics moved to the group of countries which represented an average world level.

The female Polish athletes joined the international events much later in the female competition in Brno in 24-25 May 1925. In the interwar period, they were more successful on the international arena than the men. In 1925 the PZLA joined the International Female Federation (FSFI) which enabled the Poles to take part in all international championships organised worldwide. Among others: in the World Female Olympics in Gothenburg in 1926, in Prague 1930, in London 1934, and the I European Championships in Vienna in 1938.

After the World Female Olympics in Gothenburg in 1926, the Poles were classified at IV place after England, France, Sweden, Czechoslovakia and Japan. When the NZLA joined the FSFI, the Poles were outdistanced by the German athletes. After third World Olympics in 1930, in a general classification the Poles were at the second position which they held till the outbreak of the II World War.





Zygmunt Heliasz – in 1932 year, during a athletic match in Poznan, between Poznan-Vienna – won a world record in shot put - 16.05 m

For the first time the Polish female team took part in the Olympic Games in 1928, and then in Los Angeles in 1932, and in Berlin in 1936. The PZLA's representatives' participation in the international events was impressive, among others: in 1928 in Amsterdam H. Konopacka AZS Warsaw won the first in the history of Polish sport Olympic gold medal in the discus throw, in 1932 in Los Angeles S. Walasiewicz TG 'Sokół' Warsaw won the gold medal in the 100 m sprint and the silver one in 1936 in Berlin in the discus throw, J. Wajs TG 'Sokół' Pabianice in 1932 in Los Angeles won the brown medal and in 1936 in Berlin the silver one, the next medallist of the Games was M. Kwaśniewska, who won the brown medal in javelin in 1936 in Berlin.

The first time when the Polish female athletes took part in the championships in Europe in 1938 in Vienna was very much successful for them, there were five individual medals: two gold medal of S. Walasiewicz in the 100m and 200m sprints and the silver one in the long jump, the other medals were: the silver one of the 4x100m relay team represented by B. Książkiewicz, I. Gawrońska, O. Kałuża and S. Walasiewicz, and the brown one of W. Flakowicz in the shot put. In the team scoring the Poles were classified at the II place after the Germans.

Apart from the Olympic medals, the Polish female athletes in 1926-1939 set 18 world and European records among others: in the discus throw H. Konopacka and J. Wajs, and in the 60 m, 100 m and 200 m sprints S. Walasiewicz w in 1925-1939. Except for the mentioned scores, the Poles set records in unique competitions i.e. in the 5 kg shot put with both hands, and in races.

The advancement of Polish athletics in 1919-1939 was impressive. After several years of trainings' organisation and national and international competitions the level of record scores improved greatly, and the position of Polish athletics on the international arena got better. Despite unquestionable improvement, Polish athletics was far from the world level.

Studying all the aspects influencing the evolution of athletics in the then Polish conditions there was no chance to make up for the loss and get to the European or world level. Differences in the level of sports scores were revealed during athletics competitions on the Olympic Games and the European Championships, they were also unfavourable for the Polish athletes on the world and European classification lists.