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Jewish Sport in Częstochowa Prior to World War II

During Poland's loss of statehood, the Jewish community, which had lived for centuries on Polish land, had laws imposed upon it by the partitioner. In addition, political events and the industrial revolution changed the way the community functioned. In the Russian partition, Jews played a significant role in the development of craft, trade and industry. Closed within their own cultural ghettos in small towns (shtetls) or within Jewish districts in large cities, they slowly opened up to the influences of modernisation. The degree of economic development within the Russian partition varied. The Warsaw-Vienna Railway accelerated the process of urban development. New industrial centres emerged, among them being Łódź, Częstochowa, Zagłębie Dąbrowskie, Białystok and Warsaw. These new centres created new opportunities for employment or for running your own business. At the turn of the 20th century, the populations of Częstochowa, Łódź and Zagłębie Dąbrowskie were one-third Jewish. These influxes of people, including the Jews, were moving away from their traditional forms of life which, to that time, they had lived in their closed, cultural enclaves. The traditional model of a God-fearing Jew was conflicting ever more strongly with what had become the new reality. Observing other peoples' growing interest in physical prowess, Jews increasingly became involved in physical education, sport and hiking¹.

One of the driving forces of early-capitalist, communal life was the competition for jobs, the market, profits, social position, etc.. That rivalry also moved into the area of how people spent their free time, even into social games – who had more, who was better, who went further, etc. Put simply - who was better. Horse racing and tennis attracted the richer strata of society. The middle class and the poor were equally interesting in competition – in weightlifting, running and ball games. Sport, as entertainment, was entering the communal awareness, initially, not only as a form of physical fitness, but also as entertainment. It also took the same path within the Jewish community².

The fascination with sport, both as a form of entertainment and as competition, developed in the Jewish community in the new 20th century. Częstochowa, like other urban communities in Poland, was, in the first half of the 20th century, a multicultural city in which the Jewish community was actively involved in the city's growth. Participating in sport became a new challenge. Athletic individuals inspired respect amongst their peers, thus promoting a new, healthy lifestyle. Sporting activities were introduced into the curriculum of public and private schools established by Jewish educational organisations. In the Second Polish Republic, gymnastics for children and young people was already no longer a manifestation of a “modern upbringing”, but had become a common form of education.

¹ Many publications have appeared on the subject of Jewish sport, for example U. Simri (ed.), *Physical education and sport in the Jewish history and culture*, [Netanya] 1981; *One hundred years of “muscular Judaism”*. *Sport in Jewish history and culture*, „Journal of sport history” 26, 1999, No.2; G. Eisen, *Jewish History and the Ideology of Modern Sport*, „Journal of Sport History” 25, 1998, pp. 482–531; J. Jacobs, *Jewish Workers' Sports Movements in Inter-War Poland*. *Stern and Morgenshtern in Comparative Perspective*, [in:] J. Kugelmass (ed.), *Jews, Sports and the Rites of Citizenship*, Urbana–Chicago 2007, pp. 114–128.

² T. Jurek (ed.), *Z dziejów kultury fizycznej mniejszości narodowych w Polsce w XX wieku*, Gorzów Wielkopolski 2007.

Celem opracowania jest przedstawienie dorobku organizacyjno-sportowego częstochowskich żydowskich klubów sportowych od 1915 roku, kiedy powstało Żydowskie Towarzystwo Gimnastyczno-Sportowe. Na potrzeby artykułu dokonałem kwerendy archiwalnej w Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego oraz w archiwach państwowych w Częstochowie i Kielcach. Dokonałem też kwerendy gazet ukazujących się w opisywanym okresie. Wykorzystałem także swoje wcześniejsze publikacje³.

The Role of Sport in Shaping the Profile of a Jew

The beginnings of Jewish sport should be associated with the overall societal changes, on the one hand, and on the other, with the wave of nationalism and antisemitism which took place at the end of the 19th century in the largest European countries (France, Austria-Hungary and Germany). This resulted in, among other things, the exclusion of Jews from organising sports clubs and was one of the reasons for the emergence of Zionism as a political response to the threat of antisemitism⁴. Putting of sport coincided with the Zionist ideal and became a significant element in the process of creating a “new Jew” – courageous, muscular and strong⁵. In Poland, sport, physical education and hiking gained importance when the following organisations were established – the Jewish Gymnastics-Sports Association of Bielsko (1896), the “Dror” Jewish Gymnastics-Sports Association of Lwów (1901) and the “Makabi” Jewish Sports Club of Kraków (1909). The development of these associations in southern Poland was supported by the liberal policies of the Austrian authorities⁶. In central and northern Poland (the Russian partition), however, all initiatives at establishing sporting associations were usually met with a refusal from the Tsarist authorities.

The main emphases on increasing physical fitness were focused on the harmonious development of the body and its functioning (tuberculosis prevention, lung diseases and circulation), care for the figure, conditioning of the body (cold prevention), the shaping of hygiene habits (nutrition, hygiene at work, rest), the development of beneficial skills (swimming, athletics, skiing cycling) and the learning self-defence (shooting, fencing, boxing, elements of drills). But through Jewish sports clubs, a sense of nationality was also developed (colours, traditions, emblems), with an emphasis on working together with peer groups and respect for personal and communal ownership. In addition to sports, physical culture had a broad definition. In Jewish schools, communing with nature was considered as something basic. In the summer, hiking was promoted above all (hiking and biking tours, summer camps and hiking camps.). In the winter, there were winter sports, chess and table tennis (ping-pong). Because of their physique and sensitive psychology, women learned fortitude and strength of willpower, self-confidence and the strength to counter their weaknesses.

A significant role in the formation of the profile of a young Jew was played by Jewish education, which implemented the basics of physical education, although a significant section of the younger Jewish generation remained, at that time, outside of the sports clubs. This was especially true of young Jews from orthodox families. In order to attract teenagers to sporting

³ W. Pięta, *Table Tennis among Jews in Poland (1924–1949). English Edition – Supplemented*, Częstochowa 2009; W. Pięta, A. Kozłowska, *Tenis stołowy w Częstochowie i okolicy w latach 1926–2013*, Częstochowa 2013.

⁴ W. Pięta, *Z dziejów sportu żydowskiego – tenis stołowy (1900–2014)*, a typescript in the possession of the author.

⁵ Szerzej: Ł.T. Sroka, M. Sroka, *Polskie korzenie Izraela*, Kraków–Budapest 2015.

⁶ J.C. Pick, *Sports*, [in:] *The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys*, Vol. 2, Philadelphia–New York, 1971, pp. 185–228.

organisations, a junior age group (up to 17 years) was introduced. This new category was given special attention. The acquisition of girls and women was also of importance. They were encouraged to take part in gymnastics in order to relax muscles and important hip joints during pregnancy and after childbirth. As an assessment of improvement, a State Sports Badge was introduced for both genders. An important role in the promotion of sports participation was played by sports competitions which took place in front of family, friends and large numbers of supporters. A medical examination was a prerequisite to participation competitions. Sport was also an instrument of political struggle (especially for Zionists and for those in workers parties).

The Establishment and Activity of Jewish Sports Clubs in Częstochowa

Jewish young people stood at the beginning of many sporting initiatives. These young people gathered at the “Lira” society in Częstochowa together with members of the Klub Rzemieślników (Craftsmen’s Club). In 1915, they established the Jewish Gymnastics-Sporting Association (Żydowskie Towarzystwo Gimnastyczno-Sportowe) – hereafter referred to as “ŻTG-S”. Those behind the initiative were Henryk Markusfeld, Magdalena Zalczman, Jakub Kromołowski, Mieczysław Kremski and Alter Rotbart⁷. According to its constitution, members of the association were divided into regular and non-regular (over 21 years of age) and juveniles (young people 21 years and under). Members also included those in the choir, orchestra and other sections.

Members of the Association’s board were elected annually. Membership was 100 zł for adults and 50 zł for juniors. In a short time, membership had grown to 500. After two years of activity, a gymnastics and sports competition was held. Sportspeople from Tomaszów, Sosnowiec and Będzin took part. Due to the difficulties of the post-War period, the association ceased activities until 1921, when they were resumed. One year later, the Jewish Gymnastics-Sporting Association in Częstochowa was re-registered. In 1924, organisational work in the cycling and football sections was undertaken. By 1926, the Association had a training area and a gymnastics hall. Its activity was focused on cycling and football, and then on boxing.

The “Warta” Częstochowa Sports Club (CKS “Warta”) was founded in 1921, but was only officially registered on 6th June 1923, with its headquarters at ul. Strażacka 1. Its leading sections were cycling, football, athletics, gymnastics, swimming, boxing and table tennis. In 1933, CKS “Warta” merged with the ŻTG-S and the “Ascola” Jewish Sports Club to form ŻTG-S “Maccabi”. The “Ascola” Jewish Sports Club (ŻKS) was established in 1922, under the name “Ha-Zwi” (Hebrew: “The Deer”). The new name was adopted in 1925. It was active with strong sections in tennis, table tennis, football, cycling and athletics⁸. The “Polonia” Częstochowa Sports Club was registered in 1925 and, in 1929, was renamed as the “Jordania” Sports Club. It developed cycling athletics and football sections. ŻKS “Ha-Koach” was registered in 1932, with its headquarters at ul. Warszawska 43, with a strong table tennis section⁹.

⁷ J. Rokicki, *Żydowski ruch sportowy i turystyczny w Polsce w pierwszej połowie XX wieku*, Warszawa 2004, s. 74 (a doctoral thesis written at Warsaw University).

⁸ ŻKS “Bar Kochba” also existed but, in 1924, only had a football section (“Stadion” 1924, No. 19, p. 18).

⁹ It participated in the Polish team championship in Tarnów (“Przegląd Sportowy” 1937, No. 64).

As has been already mentioned, the strongest Jewish club was established in 1933 – namely ŻTG-S “Maccabi” which had four sections affiliated with regional sporting unions (the Śląsk Regional Athletics Union, the Częstochowa Regional Table Tennis Union, the Kielce Regional Football Union and the boxing section affiliated directly with the Polish Boxing Union). The constitutional aim of “Maccabi” was to strengthen Jews physically through sports such as football, boxing, table tennis and other common events. The club consisted of honorary members (appointed at a general meeting), supporting members (who paid a membership fee twenty times that of regular members), regular members (who could be any member of the Jewish community aged 18 and over) and participants (those under 18, who had the same rights as ordinary members, except voting rights).

Members were entitled to use the club’s equipment and facilities as defined by the club authorities. They could participate in the club’s general meetings and had both active and passive voting rights. The club’s governing authorities were the General Meeting, the President, the Board, the Executive, the Court of Honour and the Audit Committee. The Board consisted of the President, three Vice-Presidents, the Chief Secretary, the Chief Treasurer, five to eight Board Members, section managers and branch representatives¹⁰. The club was divided into sections which were governed by regulations set by the Board. An important role in the life of the club was played by information published in the daily newspapers and union organs. A few Częstochowa “Maccabi” members participated in camps organised by the Central Committee of the Polish Maccabi Union. It should be added that the Union was interested in the physical education of women, appealing to all clubs to establish women’s sections. To create the right conditions for cooperation between the male and female parts of the club in Częstochowa, a number of instructions were issued to realise that aim and create a means of operation¹¹.

They were not all the sports clubs active in Częstochowa. The “Błyskawica” workers Sports Club conducted training in football and table tennis (1932). The “Ha-poel” brnch was established in 1933. Also the “Jutrznia” Workers Association of Physical Education was active in Częstochowa. It footballers and table tennis players took part in the city championships. Table tennis and football was also provided by the “Star-Sztern” Club. The large clubs were supported and based within political parties - “Maccabi” and “Ha-poel” in Poalei Zion - Right, “Jutrznia” in the Bund and “Star-Sztern” in Poalei Zion - Left. The Zionist-Revisionists cooperated with “Nordija”. This led to a great organisational fragmentation of Jewish sport.

In 1937-1939, the majority of Jewish sports club underwent an organisational crisis. After twenty-three years, ŻTG-S was removed from the Register of Associations (23rd May 1938). Up to the outbreak of World War II, “Maccabi” conducted only skeleton activities, mainly in table tennis and football. Those clubs which were still operating included “Ogniwo”, “Ha-gibor”, “Splendid”, “Admira” (boxing, football) and “Naprzod” (football). Jewish sports clubs also had great difficulty in organising and receiving subsidies, since the municipal and provincial authorities often saw them as being on the fringe of political activity.

¹⁰ The club’s assets consisted of a working capital fund, proceeds from projects, concerts, balls, reading, donations and subsidies. The reserve fund was to consist of securities, voluntary donations to this fund, along with real estate and inventory.

¹¹ Regarding Jewish women’s sports, see T. Drozdek-Małolepsza, *Sport kobiet mniejszości narodowych w Polsce w latach 1919–1939*, Prace Naukowe Akademii im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie, Seria Kultura Fizyczna, 8, 2009, pp. 75–88.

Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of Jewish Sport in Częstochowa

The celebrations of the twentieth anniversary of the Jewish sports movement took on a propaganda character. They took place on 21st-22nd September 1935 at the municipal stadium. With around 1,000 spectators, teams from Bielsko, Sosnowiec, Kielce, Chorzów, Katowice, Łódź and, of course, Częstochowa, took part¹². The celebrations began with a parade of sportsmen and women with their banners, followed by a gymnastics display to the accompaniment of a military orchestra. An athletic competition then took place which was won by “Maccabi” Łódź. The apparatus gymnastics was won by “Cytryn” of Sosnowiec. Women’s and men’s volleyball was dominated by “Maccabi” Częstochowa and the men’s basketball was won by “Maccabi” Bielsko. A football match was also played in which Częstochowa defeated Kielce 2-1¹³. Boxing also took place, although with only four non-local competitors. Częstochowa was successful, being represented by eight boxers. In the inter-region contest, Bielsko turned out better than Częstochowa. The celebrations attracted crowds of sports fans to the stadium, who were able to compare that facility with other sports venues in the Śląsk and Łódź Provinces. It was a great opportunity to showcase the sporting prowess of the Jewish minority of Częstochowa.

On that same day, in the “Maccabi” hall on ul. Katedralna, a ceremony took place in which the club banner was dedicated. The Mayor of Częstochowa, Jan Mackiewicz, was present as were the representative of the Częstochowa District Office, Malec, and Captain Jaskorzyński from the Office of Physical Education and Military Preparation in Częstochowa. The Jewish Community Council was represented by Jakob Rozenberg and the Maccabi Central Union by Mrs Lebenbaum. Also present was member of the Sejm IV, Waław Eugeniusz Kobylecki. The event was opened by Samuel Niemirowski and guests were welcome by Marian Hasenfeld¹⁴. Proceedings began with paying honour to the memory of Józef Piłsudski. This was followed by a report on the twenty years of activity of the Jewish Gymnastics-Sports Association of Częstochowa. The celebration was closed with a cultural section – a Niemirowska piano concert and recitations by Weinberg, interspersed with Jewish songs by Szmidt.

Sports Competition

Jewish athletes from Jewish associations competed in many sporting disciplines for the title of the best in Częstochowa, as well as in competitions for the title of Polish champion. In table tennis, which develops the reflexes and physical fitness, the residents of Częstochowa, in 1929, were represented by “Warta” players, who defeated “Ascola” 9:1, 8:0¹⁵. The individual tournament was won by Niemirowski, in second place was Sz. Niemirowski and third was Miško¹⁶. A year later, the Częstochowa championship was won by ŻTG-S “Hakoah”, second was Radomsko “Gwiazda-Sztern”, with third being

¹² Archives of the Wingate Institute for Physical Education, Izrael (an article by Salo Sztencel, regarding the rally and jubilee celebrations in Częstochowa).

¹³ The winners’ cup was paid for by Dr Leon Goldman – former President of ŻKS “Warta”.

¹⁴ Former football referee, President CKS „Warta”, after the War, Rector of the Częstochowa Higher School of Economics.

¹⁵ “Expresz Częstochowski” 1929, No. 76.

¹⁶ W. Pięta, *Tenis stołowy wśród Żydów w Polsce (1924–1949)*, Częstochowa 2008, pp. 76–77. Available sources do not provide the names of Częstochowa table tennis players.

“Maccabi”¹⁷. In the Polish team championship in Kraków in 1934, “Gwiazda-Sztern” came twelfth. In the individual championship, Miško, Helman and Frankenberg were unsuccessful.

In this period, ŻTG-S “Maccabi”, “Ha-poel”, “Jutrznia”, “Gwiazda” and “Nordija” were developing in table tennis. Częstochowa’s invitation to a team from Kraków was an important propaganda exercise. In the “Maccabi” hall at ul. Katedralna 13, they lost in front of 300 spectators¹⁸. On 23rd November 1935, the Jewish sporting community supported the establishment of the Częstochowa Regional Table Tennis Association, whose president became Szaja Gliksman¹⁹. The Polish championships, held in Tarnów in 1937, participants included F. Brajbart (*Hapoel*)²⁰, Rozenzweig (*Admira*) and Herszlikowna (*Hakoah*). W Częstochowa championships were conducted at a fairly high standard. Winners included Goldberg (1935), F. Brajbart (1936) and Birman (1937). Amongst the women, they included Herszlikowna (1936) and Binstokowna (1937). An important event in the history of Częstochowa sports were the Polish championships held in 1938²¹. Those who participated included Birman, Diamant (*Admira*), Weisbrodt (*Hakoah*), Drożdzyk, Mendel, Beserglik, Fuks (*Maccabi*) as well as Binstokowna (*Hakoah*) and Pirosona (*Warta*). The championships organisers’ efforts were well received.

The second discipline which brought glory to Jewish sport in Częstochowa was boxing, especially thanks to the fighters from “Maccabi” and “Warta”, the clubs being affiliated with the Śląsk Boxing Association. For example, in a trial match in 1934, “Maccabi” defeated the Police Sports Club from Sosnowiec²², at which Gedalja Binder appeared for the last time in “Maccabi” colours²³. Boxing was also offered in “Admira and in “Hapoel”. Boxing practice did not require any specialised gymnasiums. Training was held in common rooms, small rooms and even in the open air. This sporting discipline promoted strength, endurance, speed of reaction, discipline, bravery and sportsmanship.

The football sections of RKS “Błyskawica”, “Gwiazda-Sztern”, “Jutrznia” and ŻTG-S “Maccabi” competed in the Kielce Regional Football Association (1934). When, as the result of a restructuring of the PZPN (Polish Football Association), the Kielce association was liquidated and replaced with, among others, the Zagłębie Regional Football Association and teams from “Admira”, “Maccabi”, “Hakoah”, “Jutrznia” and “Gwiazda” played in the Association’s “A”, “B” and “C” grades²⁴.

Athletics was also popular amongst Jewish youth. Only Częstochowa’s ŻKG-S “Maccabi” was registered with the Śląsk Regional Athletic Association. The participation of

¹⁷ W. Pięta, A. Kozłowska, *Tenis stołowy w Częstochowie*, Częstochowa 2013, p. 9.

¹⁸ “Słowo Częstochowskie” 1934, No. 33, No. 37.

¹⁹ W. Pięta, *Od Alojzego Ehrlicha do Natalii Partyki. Współzawodnictwo sportowe 1932–2016*, Częstochowa 2016, p. 10

²⁰ Feliks Brajbart (1921–2005), tennis player, Częstochowa singles table tennis champion in 1936 and again in 1947, 1948, 1949, 1950 and 1951. During the War, he was in hiding in Żytno. He survived the Buchenwald concentration camp. After the War, he represented Częstochowa “Skrę” and later “Włokniarz” Częstochowa. In 1968, he left permanently for Israel (W. Pięta, *Od Alojzego Ehrlicha do Natalii Partyki*, p. 46).

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22. The organising committee was chaired by Erlich (Secretary of the Częstochowa Regional Table Tennis Association).

²² “Sportowiec” 1934, No. 13. “Maccabi” has so many boxers, that it has two teams in the competition - Maccabi I and Maccabi II.

²³ A lightweight boxer represented “Maccabi” Częstochowa in the Polish Maccabi championships, where he achieved second place. He in the 1935 Maccabiah (“5 Rano” dated 1st March 1935) and, following this competition, he settled permanently in Palestine. He became Palestinian champion in 1937.

²⁴ E. Małolepszy, *Ruch sportowy wśród ludności żydowskiej w Częstochowie i w powiecie częstochowskim w okresie II Rzeczypospolitej*, [in:] T. Jurek (ed.), *Z dziejów kultury fizycznej mniejszości narodowych w Polsce w XX wieku*, Gorzów Wlkp. 2007, p. 87.

their athletes was limited to competitions conducted in Gorny Śląsk. The athletes had good endurance and the ability to train systematically.

The internal rivalry between the Jewish and other clubs (in the Częstochowa, Provincial and Polish championships) displayed the level at which these sports were played. Sport also had great educational values. Training in Jewish sports clubs consisted mainly on improving and expanding individual and team skills, depending on the specific sporting discipline. One form of competition was for the acquisition of the National Sports Badge (a physical fitness examination). There were also badges for athletics, skiing and shooting. Trials, which ended with the awarding of badges, were conducted at the end of that sport's season²⁵.

Summary

Physical culture during the inter-War period in the Częstochowa area was at a good organisational and sporting level. Sports men and women, representing Jewish sporting clubs, achieved a good level nationally as numbers and new sports increased significantly. Clubs were created by sports enthusiasts who, over time, gained organisational experience – mostly self-taught. The weakness of Jewish sport in Częstochowa was its fragmentation. Despite that, against the background of Częstochowa sport, players from Jewish sports clubs were among the best at the local level, with the exception of table tennis and boxing in which Jews were considered precursors. One “Maccabi” Częstochowa member, Gedalja Binder, took part in the 1935 Maccabiah Games in Palestine which, in addition to the sports dimension, also had propaganda value. The sporting and organisational condition of the clubs was largely dependent upon each club's socio-political situation. Jewish clubs found themselves under the influence of left-wing, right-wing and even communist political parties. For this reason, the State Office for Physical Education and Military Preparation in Częstochowa hindered the development of Jewish sport by withdrawing subsidies and temporarily suspending the activities of “Maccabi”. During sporting competitions, signs of antisemitism sometimes appeared (in football, table tennis).

In the face of modest financial means, club members achieved a great deal. Experts were also involved²⁶. As well as sports facilities, clubs had libraries, reading rooms, as well as music and artistic groups. Before World War II, Jewish sports clubs contributed significantly to the development of sport in Częstochowa. It did not revive in the city after World War II and Jewish sports men and women, who survived the Holocaust, continued their sporting careers within the “Skra” Częstochowa Workers' Sports Club²⁷.

²⁵ The Wingate Institute for Physical Education Archives, Israel, Ref. 202116, File No. 18 (Maccabi and Sztern, 1930).

²⁶ It is worth remembering that Izydor Mitz, owner of a celluloid factory at ul. Wilsona 20/22, launched the “Wir” table tennis balls which were introduced into the Polish Table Tennis Association by a decision dated 25th November 1938. From the following year, the “Wir” balls replaced the Lwów “Maho” balls.

²⁷ Adam Somper (Abram Zomper) is an example. He was born on 01/05/1922 in Częstochowa and was a carpenter by trade. He played table tennis for “Maccabi”. During the occupation, he was a slave labourer in HASAG-Pelcery in Częstochowa (Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw Archive, Ref. 207/4632: List of Prisoners in HASAG-Pelcery in Częstochowa). After the War, he competed in the Polish table tennis championship in Lublin (1949) and in Wrocław (1950).