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## **From the History of the Jewish Gymnastics-Sports Association of Częstochowa (1915-1933)**

The formation of the first sports club of Polish Jews dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. They appeared in Galicia (Lwów and Kraków) at the same time as Polish sport began there<sup>1</sup>. Jewish gymnastic associations also came into existence within the Congress Kingdom of Poland. Within the Piotrków Province, within which lay Częstochowa, the Jewish Gymnastics-Sports Association was formed in 1911 in Tomaszów (Tomaszów Mazowiecki). In the following year, the Piotrków provincial authorities ratified the constitutions of the Jewish Gymnastics-Sports Association in Łódź, as well as the Zgierz Jewish Gymnastics-Sports Association<sup>2</sup>.

In Częstochowa, the first attempt at establishing a sporting club was made by a group of Jews active in a cultural association – the Częstochowa Music-Literature Association *Lira*. The initiators of that attempt were Maks Brum, Elkana Chrobołowski, A. Ganszerowicz, D. Krak and Awner. In 1913, they submitted an application for approval, signed by *Lira*'s President Henryk Markusfeld, to the Piotrków Governor, Michał Jaczewski. However, the Governor refused consent for the formation of a Jewish sports organisation in Częstochowa.

Following the outbreak of World War I in 1914, and the German army's occupation of Częstochowa, the changed political situation revived the initiative for form a Jewish sports association. In the following year, a group of activists, including those members of *Lira* involved in the previous attempt in 1913, as well as members of the Jewish football club *Samson*, held a meeting of with the Board of the Jewish Żydowski Resurs Rzemieślniczej in Częstochowa. As a result of that meeting, the Częstochowa Zionist Gymnastic Association was at the Żydowski Resurs Rzemieślniczej at the end of 1915. A Pole, Leon Jarosz, was the gymnastic instructor.

The first Jewish gymnastic display took place on 18th March 1916 at the Apollo Theatre (in the Wolberg tenement at I Alei 12)<sup>3</sup>. In 1916, this section took on the

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<sup>1</sup> *Polski słownik judaistyczny. Dzieje - kultura - religia - ludzie (Polish Dictionary of Judaica: History – Culture – Religion – People)*, by Z. Borzemińska and R. Żebrowski, Vol. I, Warsaw 2003, p. 791.

<sup>2</sup> J. Rokicki, *Żydowski ruch sportowy na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku. Osiągnięcia sportowców żydowskich w Polsce - olimpijczycy i członkowie reprezentacji Polski (The Jewish sporting movement in Poland 19th-20th century)* [in:] *Zabytki kultury żydowskiej w województwie śląskim. Referaty wygłoszone na sesji naukowej w Katowicach i Zabrze w dniach 7 i 8 września 2007 (Jewish Heritage Sites in the Śląsk Province. Papers delivered during an academic session in Katowice and Zabrze, 7th-8th September 2007)*, Katowice 2007, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> *Popis gimnastyczny (Gymnastics Display)*, *Goniec Częstochowski (Częstochowa Messenger)*, 18th March 1916, No.64, p. 2. *Goniec* reported that Saturday's gymnastic display on the stage of the Apollo Theatre filled the hall with a colourful and enthusiastic audience. The hall was festooned with a curtain of blue and white ribbons descending from the ceiling. The stage was also decorated in Zionist colours, which was most appropriate for the Zionist Gymnastics Association, under the reins of its maestro Mr.L. Jarosz. They have indeed made very significant progress, after only three months of coaching, in floor gymnastics, on the equipments, as well as in vivid groups. It is also not surprising that, after the orchestra

name the Zionist Gymnastics Association, which was later converted in the separate Jewish Gymnastics-Sports Association (ŻTGS). A huge role in this was played out by members of the Music-Literature Association *Lira* and of the Resurs Rzemieślnicze: H. Markusfeld, Jakub Kromołowski, Alter Rotbard, Mieczysław Kremiski and Magdalena Zalcmanowa. In December 1916, at a convention held in Łódź, the Częstochowa ŻTGS joined the Central Union of Jewish Gymnastic-Sports Associations (Centralny Związek Żydowskich Towarzystw Gimnastyczno-Sportowych), which had its headquarters in Łódź. The Częstochowa ŻTGS organisation was represented by Józef Aronowicz and Maks Brum<sup>4</sup>. During the next convention of the Central Union of Jewish Gymnastic-Sports Associations (12th-14th August 1918 in Łódź), Henryk Markusfeld of Częstochowa was selected as its Honorary President<sup>5</sup>.

The first public appearance by members of the ŻTGS, on Lag Ba-Omer, took place in 1916<sup>6</sup> since, from 1913, at the initiative of the Jewish Sports Club *Hasmonea*, this holyday was set aside as a Jewish sports day. Beginning in 1916, ŻTGS athletes, with their banners and orchestra, marched through the streets of Częstochowa on Lag Ba-Omer, to be enthusiastically greeted by the city's Jewish community<sup>7</sup>.

In the years 1916-1918, the ŻTGS grew, becoming one of the largest sports organisations in the country. At that time, its membership approached 700. Apart from a sports section, the Association had a theatre group, a reading room with newspapers and magazines, as well as sports publications, and conducted public lectures, among them, on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1916, in the Association's gymnasium (at ul. Ogrodowej 22), Ludwik Kempner delivered a lecture entitled "Infectious Diseases and Preventative Measures Against Them"<sup>8</sup>.

During the Polish-Bolshevik war in 1919-1920, membership numbers fell and the Association ceased operations due to the wartime situation, when members of the

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played the *Zion, Zion* national anthem, participants flooded their coach with praise in both German and in jargon. Mr Jarosz was praised, in Polish, by one of the members who, in expressing gratitude and in paying him tribute, said, "Our maestro, you have resurrected life into the people of Israel and shaken the dust off the dormant descendants of Samson". Mr. Horowicz then pinned a gold badge on the Mr. Jarosz's chest. The badge bore the inscription "With gratitude to our teacher" on one side and "S.S.G. 1915, Częstochowa" on the other side. The evening ended with two beautifully picturesque living pictures arranged by Mr Mirabela. It should be mentioned that the S.S.G. has 150 male members, while the 60 female members have been training for two weeks and will soon take part in a gymnastics show". From a gymnastics report, *Goniec Częstochowski (Częstochowa Messenger)* 22nd March 1916, No. 67, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> E. Chrobołowski, *Jidisze sport-bawegung (Jewish Sports Movement)* in: *Czenstochowerjidn*, Nowy Jork 1947, s. 101. As Jarosław Rokicki writes, "A rapidly growing network of clubs develop sporting contacts and encourage those interested in gymnastics and sport to form organisations which will decide where, on German army occupied land, will be their headquarters". The convention of Jewish sports organisations took place 25<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> December 1916 in Łódź; called during Zentral-Verband der jüdischen Tur-und Sport-Vereine in Polen (Centralny Związek Żydowskich Towarzystw Gimnastyczno-Sportowych Królestwa Polskiego) at its headquarters in Łódź. Its Chairman is Dr L. Prybulski, President of the Łódź Gymnastic-Sports Association. J. Rokicki, *Żydowski ruch sportowy (The Jewish Sports Movement)*, p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> J. Rokicki, *Żydowski ruch sportowy (The Jewish Sports Movement)*, p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> Lag Ba-omer, a minor Jewish holyday. It commemorates the death of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yo0chai (2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE). As the Rabbi's death was regarded as spiritually nuptial event, uniting the soul with the divine, the holyday is celebrated joyfully. It is also treated as a day of learning. The holyday also refers to the Maccabees (166-160 BCE.), supporters of Zionism attributing it with particular historical symbolism. A. Cała, H. Węgrzynek, G. Zalewska, *Historia i kultura Żydów polskich. Słownik (The History & Culture of Polish Jews – a Dictionary)*, Warsaw 2000, p. 179.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidm, p. 102.

<sup>8</sup> From *Żydowskiego Tow. Gimnastyczno-Sportowego (Jewish Gymnastic-Sports Association)*, "Goniec Częstochowski" 28th Nov. 1916, No. 271, p. 3.

Association responded to the call to arms. During the battle for Poland's borders, many young Jews from Częstochowa died<sup>9</sup>.

At the end of 1920, a group of Jews took on the task of reviving the Association. Among them were H. Markusfeld, J. Zylberszac, S. Frank, J. Lewkowicz, M. Szaja, A. Perec (Peretz), J. Wolf, M. Zalcmanówna and L. Prawerówna. Their efforts were met with success. On the 8th November 1922, the presidium of the Kielce Province re-registered the ŻTGS. From its Constitution, we can see that the Association was apolitical, promoted physical culture, encouraged moral behaviour and developed a sense of national unity. Its members were realistic and honorable. Its funds were drawn from entry fees, collections, donations and tickets to the Association's sporting and cultural-educational events. The ŻTGS, which enjoyed a great popularity amongst the Jewish middle class, on principle, did not involve itself in any aspect of political life<sup>10</sup>.

By the end of the 1920's, the ŻTGS found itself under the clear influence of Zionists and their ideology. Some of its members, as a result, moved to other Jewish clubs which had a different socio-political character<sup>11</sup>.

In June 1923, the ŻTGS board, apart from Hipolita Geisler, comprised Praport (salesman), Mieczysław Kremski (chemist), Aron (Perec) Peretz (dentist), Henryk (Herszlik) Lajzerowicz<sup>12</sup> (dentist), Lichtenstein (master tanner), Stanisław Kempner (merchant), L. Krygier and J. Feige (Fajge) (student)<sup>13</sup>.

Apart from the city of Częstochowa, the ŻTGS was active throughout the Częstochowa district. For example, in 1928, a branch of the Association was opened in Krzepice. At various times, its membership ranged from 100 to 500 members. In 1930, ŻTGS had 250 active members and 250 supporter members known as "the older generation"<sup>14</sup>.

Certainly, one section with the most active and largest membership was gymnastics (for example, in 1926, it had over 200 members). In 1929, it was divided into four groups: women, girls, men and children (from 8yo)<sup>15</sup>. Its membership found success in the all-Poland forum. In August 1917, in a gymnastics competition held in Częstochowa, with the participation of Jewish sporting organisations from Tomaszów (Tomaszów Mazowiecki), Będzin and Sosnowiec, M. Krakowiak won first prize and

<sup>9</sup> E. Małolepszy, *Kultura fizyczna i przysposobienie wojskowe w Częstochowie i powiecie częstochowskim w latach 1918-1939 (Physical Culture and Military Preparation in Częstochowa and the Częstochowa District in 1918-1939)*, Częstochowa 1996, p. 74; *15-lecie Żydowskiego Towarzystwa Gimnastyczno-Sportowego*, "Express Częstochowski" 1930, No.136, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> National Archives in Częstochowa (APCz) 31. Extract from ŻTGS constitution. APCz,

<sup>11</sup> Starostwo Powiatowe Częstochowskie 31, 38; J. Nowak, „Ruch sportowy w Częstochowie (1887-1939)”, p. 206 (maszynopis w zbiorach Biblioteki Miejskiej w Częstochowie).

<sup>12</sup> Henryk (Herszlik) Lajzerowicz (1893-1966?), dental surgeon, sportsman and politician. As a doctor, he practised in Częstochowa. He belonged to the *Bund*. He was active in the ŻTGS committee, was President of the Sports Club *Morgensztern*, on the board of the Medem Library. During the War, he was in the Soviet Union and returned to Poland in 1945. He left for Belgium in 1948, and then to Montreal where he died.

<sup>13</sup> *Żydzi częstochowianie. Współistnienie - Holocaust - Pamięć*, Ed. J. Mizgalski, Częstochowa 2004 (in: Sport section).

<sup>14</sup> Małolepszy, *Kultura fizyczna (Physical Culture)*, p. 74; *15-lecie Żydowskiego Towarzystwa Gimnastyczno-Sportowego*, "Express Częstochowski" 1930, No.136, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Żydowskiego Towarzystwa Gimnastyczno-Sportowego*, "Express Częstochowski" 1929 (5th November), No.254, p. 3.

J. Feige (Fajge) won a distinction. In the following year, during a competition in Łódź, Częstochowa's ŻTGS won second place. Until the end of 1918, the section coach was H. Halthojz, who was followed by J. Krakowiak, a graduate of the Łódź coaching course<sup>16</sup>.

An impressive number of sports were on offer. Apart from gymnastics, there was football, athletics, basketball, volleyball, cycling, swimming, boxing and tennis. Men as well as women competed in many of these sports.

Every now and then, the pages of the Częstochowa press gave information about registration for the ŻTGS's leading section - gymnastics. In 1926, it was managed by Dattner, a gymnastics instructor imported from Bielsko<sup>17</sup>.

The boxing section thrived. In 1929, the coach was W. Snopek, with boxing classes being held three times a week<sup>18</sup>. The ŻTGS organised professional boxing contests which, because they did not have a venue of their own, were held at the "Casino" cinema (on ul. Kościuszki). The Association's boxers competed outside Częstochowa with success - among them Przerowski who, in 1930, won his division in Katowice. In the years 1931-1932, a ŻTGS boxing team comprising Fajersztajn, Zylberberg, Chwat, Szajn and Chliwner, competed against the Siemianowice Amateur Boxing Club, winning on both occasions 6-4 and 9-3<sup>19</sup>. The Association's boxers also competed in the Kielce Regional Boxing Union championships<sup>20</sup>.

Following the building, by the ŻTGS, of courts for team sports (basketball and volleyball) in April 1932 (on Aleja Wolności 15), matches were held there regularly, featuring men's and women's teams from the ŻTGS and the All-Sports Club "Victoria". At the beginning of June, those same ŻTGS teams played the Sports Club "Brygada". In June 1932, in order to promote sport amongst children, the Association organised a *Sports Day for the Youngest* at the Aleja Wolności 15 venue. It included athletics, gymnastics and team games for children from eight to twelve years old<sup>21</sup>.

The ŻTGS cycling team was particularly active. It organised opening season races, various kinds of road races, among them being, in 1927, a scenic road race between Olsztyn and Częstochowa. There was also a three-week trip in 1928, taking in Radomsko, Piotrków, Łódź, Sieradz, Wieluń, Zawiercie, Wolbrom, Olkusz, Ojców, Kraków, Dąbrowa Górnicza, Katowice and Tarnowskie Góry. The cycling team's management committee, wishing to raise funds for its constitutional activities, arranged a dance at the Association's hall at ul. Ogrodowa 22. The biggest ŻTGS cycling team's dances were the end-of-season event during which awards were presented to the best cyclists<sup>22</sup>.

In 1925 the ŻTGS celebrated its tenth anniversary. With guests from many Polish cities (Warsaw, Sosnowiec, Będzin, Katowice, Zawiercie, Wieluń, Bielsko,

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<sup>16</sup> Chrobołowski, *Jidisze sport-bawegung*, p. 102, 103; "Express Częstochowski" 1926, No.258, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> "Nowy Express Częstochowski" 1926 No.240 p. 3, No.258 p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> "Express Częstochowski" 1929 No.80 p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> "Express Częstochowski" 1930, No.68, p. 3; "Ostatnie Wiadomości Częstochowskie" 1932, No.360, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> *Z Żydowskiego Towarzystwa Gimnastyczno-Sportowego*, "Express Częstochowski" 1929 (5th November), No.254, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> "Ostatnie Wiadomości Częstochowskie" 1932, No.117 p. 4, 130 p. 4, No.132 p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> "Nowy Express Częstochowski" 1926 No.253 p. 3, 1927 No.217 p. 3, No.248 p. 2; "Express Częstochowski" 1928, No.160, p. 2.

Tomaszów and Dziedzic), celebrations included a march through the streets of Częstochowa (with the Association's orchestra which was started in 1924) and a gymnastics display. A book was published on the history of Jewish sport in Częstochowa (edited by Mieczysław Asz). Chairman of the Anniversary Committee was Szymon Chajutin and Finance Committee Chairman was Osjasz Win. Members of the Association's board at that time were Joachim (Chaim) Dawidowicz - Preisident, Szymon Chajutin - Vice-President, Aron Perec (Peretz), Herszlik Lajzerowicz, H. Tajchner, Bernard (?) Kurland, L. Krygier, C. Lichtensztajn, F. Kirnszblat, M. Praport, A. Wierzbicki, H. Gonszerowicz and J. Feige (Fajge)<sup>23</sup>.

At the next anniversary of the ŻTGS's establishment, great athletic and football competitions were organised. In 1927, on the Association's twelfth anniversary, a football championship was held for a cup paid for by the Association's Vice-President Edward Jacobson. Almost all Częstochowa clubs took part including, "Ascola", "Błyskawica", "Burza", "Concordia", "Częstochowa Sports Club", "Hagibor", "Skra", "Turyści", "Victoria", "Warta" and, of course, ŻTGS. "Warta" won the cup, defeating "Turystów" in the final<sup>24</sup>. A large athletics event took place in 1930 on the Association's fifteenth anniversary. During that event, ŻTGS athlete Efraim (Fredek) Szmaragd<sup>25</sup> won the long jump<sup>26</sup>.

At the end of 1922, ŻTGS engaged in merger discussions with the other Jewish club, KS "Warta". The talks ended unsuccessfully. In 1924, the "Sport" sports organisation, comprising Jewish high school students, joined ŻTGS<sup>27</sup>.

In 1926, the board of ŻTGS comprised Edward Jacobson, Wichler, Szymon Chajutin, Michał Grejniec<sup>28</sup>, Aron Perec (Peretz), Tenenbaum, Chajman Najman and Arnold Bram<sup>29</sup>. In that year, at a meeting of the whole Association, the issue of the ŻTGS linking with other large sports clubs was discussed. This was aimed at forming an even stronger sports organisation. The discussion, which was chaired by A. Bram, decided against the idea<sup>30</sup>.

ŻTGS activists returned to this proposal a few years later. On 30th August 1930, at an Extraordinary General Meeting of Members, discussions were held on whether the ŻTGS should merge with the Częstochowa Sports Club "Warta". The issue of the merger and the formation of one strong sports organisation (named ŻTGS "Warta")

<sup>23</sup> Chrobołowski, *Jidisze sport-bawegung*, p. 103.

<sup>24</sup> "Nowy Express Częstochowski" 1927, No.217, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Efraim (Fredek) Szmaragd was one of the first Jewish gymnasts and sports organisers in Częstochowa. He was an all-round sportsman - a gymnast, footballer, athlete. He excelled at each discipline, winning many Częstochowa championships in various athletic contests (in the 1920's, he achieved outstanding results - 11 sec for 100m, 175cm in the high jump). As a sports activist, he organised Częstochowa's first boxing, volleyball and basketball teams. B. Orenstein, "Churban Czenstochow", [b.m.w.] 1948, p. 387.

<sup>26</sup> "Express Częstochowski" 1930, No.185, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Małolepszy, *Kultura fizyczna (Physical Culture)*, p. 75.

<sup>28</sup> Michał Grejniec (1876-1941), dental surgeon, co-operative and sports activist. From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he practised in Częstochowa (at I Alei 10, and later at przy II Alei 24). He founded the *Samopomoc* co-operative. In 1909, he displayed his chemo-dental preparations at the Industry and Agriculture Exhibition in Częstochowa. He perished in 1941 w Warsaw.

<sup>29</sup> Arnold (Aron) Bram (1887-1942), doctor, city councillor, political and community activist. He was a doctor at Częstochowa's Jewish Hospital, specialising in internal medicine and radiology. On four occasions (1925, 1927, 1934, 1939), he was elected to the City Council. A Zionist activist, he led the Zionist organisation in Częstochowa. He was Vice-President of the Society for Jewish Health Care in Poland (TOZ). He perished in 1942 in Kowal (?).

<sup>30</sup> "Nowy Express Częstochowski" 1926, No.258, p. 3.

was publicised in the press. The merger would increase the possibility of promoting the benefits of physical culture amongst Jewish youth<sup>31</sup>.

At this time, the ŻTGS took over the asset of Sports Club "Jordania", which had collapsed in 1929. The intention of ŻTGS to join up with another, stronger Jewish club was realised three years after. In 1933, at the initiative of KS "Ascola", ŻTGS, KS "Warta" and KS "Ascola", joined the World Maccabi Union and formed the Jewish Gymnastics-Sports Association "Makkabi"<sup>32</sup>.

Presidents of ŻTGS were Dr. Hipolit Geisler (from 1915)<sup>33</sup>, Aron Perec (Peretz) (1921-1922)<sup>34</sup>, H. Geisler (1922-1925), Joachim (Chaim) Dawidowicz<sup>35</sup> (from May 1925 to August 1926. From 1926 to January 1929, the position was held by Szymon Chajutin<sup>36</sup>. Following his death, Leon Asz was President until 1933<sup>37</sup>.

*Żydowskie Towarzystwo Gimnastyczno-Sportowe* was Częstochowa's oldest and, in the 1920's and early 1930's, the largest sports organisation. Several hundred young men, women and children trained in numerous sports. The Association's activists, trainers and sports participants were recruited, in the main, from the local community. From the beginning, a Zionist influence was dominant within it.

<sup>31</sup> "Express Częstochowski" 1930, No.191 p. 3, No.207 p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Chrobołowski, *Jidisze sport-bawegung*, p. 103; Małolepszy, *Kultura fizyczna*, p. 75.

<sup>33</sup> Geisler (Gajzler) Hipolit (1886-1940), doctor, city councillor, sports and community activist. A major in the Polish Army Reserve, an army doctor. As a doctor of the Provincial Health Fund, he worked in Częstochowa and Blachownia. He was President of the Association of Jewish Craftsmen. Twice (in 1925 and 1927), he was elected to the Częstochowa City Council. In 1924, he belonged to the District Health Fun. He was a member of the Municipal Military Preparation and Physical Education Committee and Vice-President of Jewish Health Care Association

<sup>34</sup> Aron Peretz (Perec), dental surgeon, political, communal and sports activist, a city councillor. He owned a dental clinic. In 1918-22, he was one of the most active in the Częstochowa Bund. In 1914, he was Vice-President of the Częstochowa Music-Literature Association "Lira", a board member of the Jewish Health Care Association and the Jewish Charitable Association. From 1929, he was a city councillor (following the resignation of H. Lederman).

<sup>35</sup> Joachim (Chaim) Dawidowicz (-1942?), industrialist. He completed his technical studies in France. Founded in 1895, he was owner of Saturn Limestone Plant, he also a wholesale warehouse dealing in coal, cement, tar and building materials. He was co-owner and director of *Metalurgia*, President of the Industrial and Merchant Bank and a member of the Kielce Provincial Industrial-Commercial Chamber.

<sup>36</sup> Szymon Chajutin (ok. 1872-1929), co-operative, communal and sports activist, a sports umpire. In 1919, he was co-founder and board member of the *Achdus* co-operative. He was a board member of the Częstochowa Sports Club "Warta", President of the Sports Club "Jordania". He initiated the Jewish Students Assistance Committee. With a great time commitment, he did all he could to make ŻTGS remain financially viable.

<sup>37</sup> Chrobołowski, *Jidisze sport-bawegung*, pp. 101-103; Małolepszy, *Kultura fizyczna*, p. 74; "Express Częstochowski" 1930, No.136, p. 3; "Nowy Express Częstochowski" 1926, No.258, p. 3.

Asz Leon (Lejb) (1899-1942), lawyer, Częstochowa city councillor, sports and crafts activist. He graduated as a lawyer. Around 1928, he applied to become a judge. He graduated as a Doctor of Laws. As a lawyer, he was connected to Częstochowa (his home and office were on ul. Piłsudski 9). He was actively involved in sport. He was President of the ŻTGS. From 1934, he was Vice-President of the Jewish Gymnastic-Sports Association "Makkabi". In 1942, he was deported from the Częstochowa ghetto and was murdered in Treblinka.

