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OLYMPIC AND SPORTS MOVEMENT IN POLAND (1918–1939)

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Abstract

After gaining Poland's independence in 1918 the government of the country began an active work on the establishment of a national system of physical education for children and youth. Among important aspects of reforming this area was the implementation of an important task – the development of mass sports in the country. In 1919 the Polish Olympic Committee was set up whose task was to popularize the Olympic movement in the country, the representation of Polish sports in Europe and the world, the development of sport among different age groups of society, creating optimal conditions for physical education and sports, assistance in preparation of Polish athletes to participate in the summer and winter Olympic Games.

In a short period (1919–1921) the federations were established in the country: track and field, football, cycling, speed skating etc. which contributed to the development of the sports movement in Poland. In 1935, 473,000 athletes regularly trained in 4500 sports clubs and sections that functioned in different regions of the country. In Poland a wide network of sports medicine centers was created in which 770 doctors of sports medicine worked.

Since 1924 Polish athletes have taken an active part in the summer and winter Olympic Games and get prizes in different sports. In the post war years Poland's national teams perform in the most prestigious competitions at all the Olympics. The Polish Olympic Committee actively participates in the world Olympic movement and promotes the further development of the mass sports in the country.

Key words: Poland, Olympic Games, movement, sport, physical culture, sports competitions.

Едуард Вільчковський, Володимир Пасічник. Олімпійський і спортивний рух у Польщі (1918–1939 рр.).

Після отримання Польщею незалежності в 1918 р. уряд країни розпочав активну діяльність щодо створення національної системи фізичного виховання дітей та молоді. Серед важливих аспектів реформування цієї галузі – вирішення питання про розвиток масового спорту в країні. У 1919 р. створено Польський олімпійський комітет, завданням якого стала популяризація Олімпійського руху в країні, представництво польського спорту в Європі та світі; розвиток спорту серед різних вікових груп суспільства; створення відповідних умов для занять фізкультурою та спортом; сприяння в підготовці польських спортсменів до участі в літніх та зимових Олімпійських іграх.

За короткий період (1919–1921 рр.) у країні створено федерації легкої атлетики, футболу, лиж, велосипедного, ковзанярського спорту та ін., які сприяли розвитку спортивного руху в Польщі. У 1935 р. 473 тис. спортсменів регулярно тренувались у різних регіонах країни. У Польщі створено досить широку мережу спортивно-лікувальних центрів, у яких працювали 770 лікарів спортивної медицини.

Починаючи з 1924 р., польські спортсмени брали участь у літніх та зимових Олімпійських іграх, отримуючи перемоги в різних видах спорту. Польський олімпійський комітет бере активну участь у світовому Олімпійському русі й сприяє подальшому розвитку масовості спорту в країні.

Ключові слова: Польща, Олімпійські ігри, Олімпійський рух, спорт, фізична культура, спортивні змагання.

Эдуард Вильчковский, Владимир Пасечник. Олимпийское и спортивное движение в Польше (1918–1939 гг.).

После получения Польшей независимости в 1918 г. правительство страны начало активную деятельность по отношению создания национальной системы физического воспитания детей и молодежи. Среди важных аспектов реформирования этой области была реализация важной задачи – развитие массового спорта в стране. В 1919 г. создан Польский олимпийский комитет, задачами которого стали популяризация Олимпийского движения в стране, представительство польского спорта в Европе и мире; развитие спорта среди разных возрастных групп общества; создание оптимальных условий для занятий физкультурой и спортом; содействие в подготовке польских спортсменов к участию в летних и зимних Олимпийских играх.

За короткий период (1919–1921 гг.) в стране созданы федерации по легкой атлетике, футболу, лижному, велосипедному, конькобежному спорту и др., которые содействовали развитию спортивного движения в Польше. В 1935 г. 473 тыс. спортсменов регулярно тренировалось в 4500 спортивных клубах и секциях, которые функционировали в разных регионах страны. В Польше была создана широкая сеть спортивно-лечебных центров, в которых работали 770 врачей спортивной медицины.

С 1924 г. польские спортсмены берут активное участие в летних и зимних Олимпийских играх и занимают призовые места в разных видах спорта. В этих самых престижных соревнованиях сборные команды Польши выступают на всех Олимпиадах, которые проводились в послевоенные годы. Польский олимпийский комитет активно участвует в мировом Олимпийском движении и способствует дальнейшему развитию массовости спорта в стране.

Ключевые слова: Польша, Олимпийские игры, Олимпийское движение, спорт, физическая культура, спортивные соревнования.

Introduction. The ideas of Olympism and the mass sporting movement development overcame a well-educated part of the society of different countries in the world in the second half of the XIX century. The enormous labour, the talent for organization and the enthusiasm of Pierre de Coubertin, the French teacher and a prominent physical cultural worker, and those of his comrade-in-arms, made it possible to conduct in June of 1894 the International congress of the Athletics union, where the International Olympic Committee (IOC) was selected.

At the congress the concept “Olympism” was coined, the aim of which is the use of sport for the person’s harmonious development and the stimulation of the person for the improvement of a peaceful coexistence of different societies, that are grounded on the honouring of human dignity. Pierre de Coubertin’s Olympism includes: democracy, liberty of spirit, dignity, respect to every personality, fraternity, observance of positive moral norms regardless of the person’s race and religion. The realization of Olympism concept necessarily envisaged the popularization of sports movement in the country, the development of different sports disciplines, the promotion of the regular sports trainings, the creation of sports industry, the training of pedagogical personnels in this industry etc.

It should be noted, that during this historical period Polish lands were shared between three states: Russia, Austria-Hungary and Prussia and the Polish people were under long-term occupation of these countries. Therefore the ideas of olympic motion impressed the patriotic part of the Polish society. They found a positive response and the desire to realize the idea of Olympism in the system of physical education of children and students.

The research goal is to analyse the development of Olympic and sports movement in Poland in 1918–1939.

Research Results. Discussion. In the second half of the XIX century, a period of perceptible influence of the West-European gymnastic systems on Polish physical education, the personal interest of students and intelligentsia in the ideas of ancient Greek Olympic games grew considerably. At the end of the XIX and at the beginning of the XX of centuries in Poland the speed-up process of creating sports societies and clubs in different types of sport started. In 1908 the societies of academic rowers (created in 1878), cyclers (1886) and skaters (1893) functioned actively in Warsaw. Considerable popularity had also football and track-and-field clubs, which were founded in different regions of Poland. On the eve of the World War I sports clubs «Venetia» in Ostrovzi (1908), «Warta» in Poznan (1912), «Unia» in Leshno (1913), «Wisła» in Krakov (1906) and others functioned actively [7, s. 273–274].

During that period the interest in physical culture and sports began to spread among great masses of population, and the first to get interested were the workers of industrial enterprises (especially in cities). In 1910 the society of Activists of the development of physical education was founded in Lodz. In 1911–1913 this society conducted systematic trainings in sports sections of football, gymnastics (separately for men, women and children), fencing etc. Similar sporting societies began to operate actively in other Polish cities, like Piotrków Trybunalski, Zgierz, Sosnowiec and others [7, s. 279–280].

In this period the amount of the articles about Greek agonistics, that were published in press (magazines, newspapers), grew considerably. In the articles Pierre de Coubertin’s ideas of Olympism and conceptions of Olympic sports were promoted, the course and the results of modern Olympic Games came into question.

The idea of Olympism was popular in Polish society since olden times. At the end of the XIX and at the beginning of the XX centuries a considerably great number of publications about the Greek system of physical education of children and young people, as well as articles about Olympic movement in other countries of the world were given out. The ideas of Olympism and necessity of revival of modern Olympic Games were analyzed in them; the organization and the results of the Olympic games, beginning from 1896 (Athens) were discussed. The special attention was paid to Polish magazines and Olympic games that were held in Stockholm in 1912. The special delegation that consisted of sports figures and journalists drove out to Sweden to learn the program of the Olympic Games and receive the necessary information on realization of these competitions. This was of great importance in the conditions when the Polish sportsmen could not participate in the Olympic Games in the national team under the national flag. Some Polish sportsmen, as, for example, an athlete V. Ponurski, riders K. Rommel and S. Zahorski, participated in Stockholm Olympic Games in the teams of Austria-Hungary and Russia.

It is notable, that Organizing Committee of the V Olympic Games did not have formal grounds to invite the Polish sportsmen to participating in competitions as an independent delegation. In connection with that Poland, next to some other countries, which at that time did not have their own National Olympic Committee and representatives in the International Olympic Committee, could not get official invitation to participating in these Olympic Games.

The Olympic Games in Stockholm caused wide resonance and personal interest of population of different age groups in Poland. Considerable and various information that was related to these Olympic Games assisted the best understanding by the wide layers of society the role and the value of sport in the vital functions of humanity and the importance of the participation of the Polish sportsmen in the Olympic games under the national flag. According to the program of the Olympic Games All-Polish sports competitions were initiated in Lodz and Warsaw. There begins the acceleration of the process of associating Polish sports movement and creating national organizational sports structures. The greater role was played in this process by the representatives of sports circles of Warsaw and Krakov. The necessity of participation of Polish sports delegation in the Olympic Games was raised in September 1918 at the First convention of Sports and Gymnastic Societies of Poland, that took place in Warsaw.

At this convention among many important questions related to the development of the physical culture and sport in the country, the question of creation of Polish Olympic Committee and obligatory participation of the Polish sports delegation in the next Olympic Games was considered. One of interesting suggestions, in the context of popularization of olympic ideas among a population, was that of the organization and realization in 1919 the national Olympic Games aimed at the improvement of the preparation of the Polish sportsmen to participating in international competitions [2, s. 7–10].

Soon, taking into consideration the fact of calling the next convention of the representatives of tourist, ski and track-and-field societies on October 11–12, 1918 in Krakov, there was created a Committee engaged in the preparation of the Polish sportsmen to participating in the next Olympic Games. The Committee included well-known sports figures: S. Kopchinski, M. Orlovich, T. Kukhar, L. Hristelbauer, and K. Hemerling. The representatives of the ministries of health and labour participated in the work of this Committee also. It was foremost made decision to take up the creation of sporting societies in the most popular kinds of olympic sport, and to begin an active preparation for the participating of the Polish sports delegation in the Olympic Games in Antwerpen.

Polish Committee of Olympic Games was founded on October, 12, 1919, and in 1925 it was renamed into Polish Olympic Committee (POC). The posts of the head and co-head of the Committee were taken by J. Galer and T. Yanishevski respectively. J. Pilsudski was selected the honoured chairman. The presidium asked the International Olympic Committee to admit Poland to the membership [3, s. 16–25].

POC determined its basic directions of the activity for that historical period: development and popularization of Olympic movement in Poland; representation of Polish sport in Europe and the world; the development of amateur sport in the country; the creation of necessary conditions and assistance in preparation of the Polish sportsmen to participating in the Olympic Games; fight against corruption in sport.

It's notable that in 1937 Poland was the organizer of the IOC session in Warsaw, where the members of a new Executive Committee were approved, and the Japanese city of Sapporo was chosen to accept the next winter Olympic games in 1940. However, as a result of the beginning of World War II, and extremely tense political situation in the world, those Olympic Games were not held at the appointed time. Sapporo became the capital of the Olympic Games only in 1972. The session also considered the suggestion of A. Zamoiski – the Chairman of Gymnastics International Federation, to grant the teachers of gymnastics the status of amateurs. It gave them the opportunity to participate in Olympic competitions. The conferences considered also the problems of collaboration of the IOC with National Olympic Committees of the countries and created a commission on the matters of racial discrimination. That fact was of a great value for the world sports movement that functioned in the period of spreading chauvinistic and nazi world-views in Germany and Italy (in 20s–30s of XX century a chauvinistic world-view was spread in Japan as well). A program project to create the Olympic museum in Lausanne was considered too.

After gaining the independence, Poland's first steps of the development of the national physical culture and sports movement were extraordinarily difficult. In spite of this the sports movement in the country during an intermilitary period (1918–1939) was developing rapidly. During 1919–1921 there were founded the following federations: football, tennis, track-and-field, skiing, cycling, skating and rowing. In October, 1921 the Polish Federation of Sport was created. In 1924 the following federations began their activity: swimming, boxing, fencing, yachting. Compare: in 1921 there were 70,000 sportsmen registered, in 1924 their number increased to 115,000, and in 1935 there were 473,000 sportsmen that trained in 4500 sports organizations [6, s. 295–300]. A considerable role in the development of physical culture and sports in the country in this period was played by the Society of Polish Youth. It registered 185,000 members, out of which 32,800 went in for sport systematically [5, s. 31].

An active role in the popularization of sport was played also by the Rural Youth Union, which largely popularized physical culture and sports in the rural regions of the country. Track-and-field dominated the popularity among the members of this Union. In rural regions numeral track-and-field competitions were held at different levels – from district to interregional. In 30s the best results were shown by sportsmen from Bilostock and Lubelsk provinces. Athletes of the Rural Youth Union also took part in the national championships and won prizes more than once.

It is necessary to mention, that with the development of the Polish sport the Polish sports medicine was improving at rapid rates. In 1936 on the territory of the entire country there functioned 94 sports medicine centres under the authority of the regional (voyevoda) sports committees; 4 sports medicine centers were founded at universities, 5 sports medicine centres of profile character operated at sports clubs. At that time about 500 doctors, who had completed the special sports medicine courses and 270 doctors who had taken the courses at the Central Institute of Physical Culture in Warsaw, worked in sports medicine. In general, according to H. Kunski, approximately 40% of young people engaged in physical culture and sports, were under the systematic doctors' care. This fact, taking into account an extraordinarily difficult for Poland political and economic period of 1919–1925, was a considerable achievement [4, s. 9].

The Polish Olympic Committee from the beginning of its existence had high public rating and became a dominant organization in sports movement, introducing Polish sport to the international scene, promoting Olympic ideas among the wide layers of population, binding sports movement to social and cultural life and art, playing an important and decisive role in organization of sport in the first years of independent Poland. Playing the role of the initiator of the activity of sports societies, and carrying out events, which added to the popularization and the organization of sport in the country, the Olympic Committee, by the time of foundation of the Polish Sports Union in 1922 and the State Department of Physical Education and Military training in 1927, occupied a central place in sports movement of Poland [3, s. 16–25].

The Olympic Committee as early as in 1919 began an intensive preparation to participating of the Polish sportsmen in the Olympic Games. Already in 1920 the national team of Polish sportsmen was ready to take part in the Olympic Games, but in the consequence of continuous Soviet-Polish war it could not participate in VII Olympic Games in Antwerpen. Polish connection with the Olympic Games was shown only by the national flag of Poland symbolically hung out at the olympic stadium.

The first official start of Poland in the Olympic Games was in 1924 at I Winter Olympic Games in Chamonix-Mont-Blanc (France). Sports honour of the country was secured by eight skiers (with one woman among them) and one skater. The same year the Polish team participated in VIII summer Olympic Games in Paris, where it got the first honoured rewards: 1 silver medal in cycling and 1 bronze medal in equestrianism. At the IX Olympic Games in Amsterdam in 1928 a disk thrower G. Konopatska got the first in history of Polish sport gold medal. Two more gold medals were got by the Polish sportsmen at the Olympic Games in Los Angeles – S. Valasievich for the 100 m race and Ya. Kukhotsinski for the 10000 m race. As a whole, besides 3 gold medals Polish sportsmen got 6 silver and 11 bronze medals at the Summer and Winter Olympic Games during the intermilitary period [7, s. 346–347].

Great success in this historical period was obtained by Polish fencers. At the Summer Olympic Games in 1928 and 1932 the national fencing team got bronze medals, and in 1936 (Olympic Games in Berlin) took the 4th place. Besides success in sport Polish fencing got also an organizational success: in 1934 Poland served as host for the championship of Europe in this kind of sport.

The most popular kind of sport in Poland was football. The Polish Soccer Union at the beginning of 20s officially registered 2,500 football players in 126 clubs. The best result of Polish football at the Olympic stadiums was obtaining the 4th place in Berlin in 1936. It should be mentioned, that the Polish national team also participated in the football world cup championship in 1938 in France, where in the match of the first stage in a dramatic fight only in extra-time it lost to the team of Brazil 5:6.

It is notable, that at the XI Olympic Games in Berlin Poland presented one of the largest in number national teams. It was one of the best organized Olympic Games, beginning from 1896. At these Olympic Games the transmission of a torch with Olympic flame from ancient Olympia to Berlin was initiated. 4 gold medals were got at once by a legendary black-skinned athlete Jessy Owen Sam from the USA. These Olympic Games are noted also by first televisional translations of sports competitions from the Olympic stadium and other places. However, unfortunately, at the Olympic Games the organizers tried to conduct a wide propaganda of the nazi ideology among sportsmen and foreign tourists from different countries and to show political and economic superiority of Fascist Germany. At these Games Polish sportsmen took the 4 place in basketball and in fencing.

Besides the basic sports competitions of the XI Olympic Games other sports events took place. Youth (mainly, students) sports delegations were invited to Berlin. 30 delegations arrived from different countries of the world, they lived in international sports camps. Among them there was a Polish youth delegation that presented the students from the Warsaw Central Institute of physical education and faculties of physical education of Poznan and Krakiv universities. Besides sports competitions the Polish students participated in the International congress where the questions of physical education and development of mass sport among young people came into question [1, s. 12–21].

It should be noted that the Polish Olympic Committee played a considerable role in the collaboration of state and public institutions that were related to physical education and sport, Polish organizations and foreign associations (Polonia). This collaboration became stronger due to the successful performances of the Polish sportsmen, that participated actively in the meetings of sports delegations with the representatives of the Polish foreign diasporas. In 1934 the POC rendered a considerable help to the diasporas of different countries of the world in the organization and holding of sports competitions [3, s. 16–25].

Conclusions:

– regardless of a difficult social, economic and political situation in Poland after gaining the independence in 1918, there started a great work of public establishments and sports figures on the creation of state and public organizations of physical culture and sport;

– a considerable role in the development of the Olympic movement and its popularization in the country was played by the Polish Olympic Committee established in 1919. Nowadays, it is one of the oldest national Olympic Committees in Europe that participates actively in the world Olympic movement;

– from 1924 the Polish sportsmen begin to participate in the summer and winter Olympic Games;

– simultaneously with Olympic movement the development of mass sport begins in Poland. Federations, societies and clubs in different kinds of sport, that assist the organization of mass sports movement in all regions of the country are founded .

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