

POLISH MEDALISTS IN JUDO AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES IN YEARS 1992–2000

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Abstract:

Judo, as an Olympic sports discipline, was already known in Poland in the 19th century. Polish judokas' international fame aroused hopes for Olympic medals in post-war Poland (in the presented study the attention was focused on the theoretical synthesis). The author intended to concentrate on theoretical synthesis of the Polish judo champions' participation in the Olympic Games after the period of Poland's systemic transformation, presenting eight-year achievements of the competitors in the years 1992–2000. Further assessment and synthesis of the Polish champions' struggles will be described in the upcoming paper (The development of judo as an Olympic sports discipline in the years 1992–2016).

INTRODUCTION

The traditions of judo in Poland date back to the 1960s and 1970s. Polish competitors in every event of the championship rank always achieved very good results, often winning medals. The late 1980s and 1990s are the period when Polish judokas were the most successful: two Olympic gold medals won by Waldemar Legień (1988 and 1992) and at the next Olympic Games (Atlanta 1996) by Paweł Nastula. Apart from these successes no other judoka from Poland was able to win the Olympic medal.

Judo originates from Japan. Jigoro Kano, who lived in the years 1860–1938, was the founder of judo. He systematized and improved holds in jiu-jitsu by giving them a new form. First of all, he removed from jiu-jitsu all elements which could pose a threat to life or health. He also introduced new techniques he created himself. The name 'judo' can be explained as a way to agility or a way to submission (JU - gently, submit; DO - way, principle). The setting up of a new system was the harmonious development of the spirit and body, which was realized by the mutual cooperation and taking care of one's own safety and the one of the opponent's¹.

The book "*Japoński system trenowania ciała dla młodzieży*" ('*The Japanese system of training the body for young people*') by H. Hancock Irwing was published and translated by Wojciech Szukiewicz in Poland, in 1908. A year later, in Warsaw, Zygmunt Kłośnik published his book "*Dżiu-dżitsu, czyli źródło zdrowia, siły i zręczności*" ('*Jiu-jitsu i.e. source of health, strength and dexterity*'). It was not until the 1920s that the first Polish book by Henryk Szot- Jeziorowski "*Walka wręcz jiu- jitsu*" ('*Close combat – jiu- jitsu*') appeared².

In the 1930s some elements of jiu-jitsu were introduced into the curricula of military academies and the training of Polish National Police. The leading figure in those years was an outstanding sabre fencer major Kazimierz Laskowski - Olympic bronze medalist in the team

¹Kuźmicki S.: *Judo. Historia i metodyka*, Warszawa 2011, p. 24.

²Ibidem, p. 37.

sabre (Amsterdam 1928), a lecturer at the Central Institute of Physical Education in Warsaw. Except for fencing and boxing, he demonstrated the elements of jiu-jitsu to his students.

In 1946, on the initiative of the manager of the practical training at the Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw mgr mjr Marian Skierczyński, self-defence was introduced into school curricula used at that time. The subject 'Self-Defence - jiu-jitsu' was then referred to as judo. Czesław Borejsza, the Head of Strength Athletics Section was the lecturer. A few years later, in 1949, on the initiative of Czesław Borejsza and Tadeusz Kochanowski, the first judo section, which was targeted at self-defence and jiu-jitsu, was created³.

In 1950 took place the so-called '*First step of judo*' during which various defensive techniques were presented. The event was of demonstrative nature and the competitors were evaluated as in rhythmic gymnastics. The correctness and artistic value of the performance were evaluated. At this time at the Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw, the so-called "images of judo", consisting in demonstrating specially prepared arrangements of jiu-jitsu, self-defence and judo techniques, were held. All these shows and "images" were quite popular and attracted many observers, enthusiasts of Japanese martial arts.

From the 18th to 19th of May 1957, First Individual Polish Senior Championships in Judo were organised in Łódź. There were only a few true judokas. Freestyle wrestlers and other sportsmen e.g. sports acrobats took part in the championships. The first Polish champions were: Zbigniew Wójcik (AZS Kraków), Kazimierz Jaremczuk (TWF Gdańsk), Adam Świącz (AZS AWF Warsaw), Waldemar Kołaczkowski (AZS AWF Warsaw), Ryszard Zieniawa (TWF Gdańsk), Marian Ulfik (AZS AWF Warsaw). The rivalry at the first championships was the perfect moment to establish the Polish Judo Association, which was registered in the Court Register in Warsaw on the 19th of July 1957. The founders (having legal personality) were: AZS AWF Warsaw, AZS Kraków and Legia Warsaw, which although it did not possess the section of judo, agreed to become one of founding members as a necessary third sports association. Tadeusz Kochanowski (who was at the same time the President of Polish Weightlifting Federation) became the President of Polish Judo Association⁴.

Popularization of judo in Poland was reflected in the emergence of the consecutive sports clubs. In the academic, working-classes and military communities the next sections of judo started to appear in AZS Kraków, TWF Zryw Gdańsk, Gwardia Wrocław. In the 1960s next sections of judo in sport clubs (Czarni Bytom, Flota Gdynia, GKS Wybrzeże Gdańsk, Jagiellonia Białystok, Polonia Bydgoszcz, Wisła Kraków) and in academic centers from Gliwice, Gdańsk and Poznań came into being.

In 1961 the First World Championships in Paris took place (without the division into weight categories). The first Pole - R. Zieniawa - occurred as a debutant then, losing by ippon (Uchi mata) with a champion and judo legend - Anton Gessink.

The first European Championships in Judo took place in 1963 in Geneva, there representatives of Poland had their first, significant international success. Jan Okrój from Wybrzeże Gdańsk won the bronze medal in lightweight. Following his success, other competitors also became successful: Kazimierz Jaremczuk (bronze medal of the European Championships in Madrid in 1965), Czesław Łaksa (Luxembourg 1966, silver medal), Czesław Kur (bronze medal, Lozanna 1968)⁵.

The year 1972, was the one when judo made its debut at the Olympic Games, where four Poles: Stanisław Mieczkowski, Marian Tałaj, Antoni Zajkowski and Włodzimierz Lewin went to. Antoni Zajkowski confirmed his skills, winning the silver medal after his loss in the finals (Photo 1). This was the historical medal for Polish judokas.

³Kuźmicki S.: *Judo. Historia i metodyka*, Warszawa 2011, p.38.

⁴Ibidem, p. 39.

⁵Błach W.: *Judo. Szkolenie najmłodszych i trochę starszych*. COS Warszawa 2008, p. 8.



Photo 1. Antoni Zajkowski – the bronze medalist of the 1972 Olympic Games
(photo by Waldemar Dorcz)

The next Olympic Games took place in 1976 in Montreal. Marian Tałaj won the bronze medal and Marian Standowicz was the fifth. After the Olympic Games, Polish judokas: Antoni Rejter, Adam Adamczyk, Zbigniew Bielawski, Edward Alkanin and Janusz Pawłowski won medals at World and European Championships. The latter one – Janusz Pawłowski also won the Olympic bronze medal in Moscow in 1980⁶.

Next Olympic successes came in 1988 when Waldemar Legień won the gold medal (he also won the gold medal at the Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992 – Photo 2) and Janusz Pawłowski (Photo 3) the silver medal.



Photo 1. Waldemar Legień – double Olympic Games gold medalist in judo
(photo from the collection of „Czarni” Bytom judo club)



Photo 3. Janusz Pawłowski – double Olympic Games medalist in judo
(photo from www.judoinfo.pl)

⁶Kuźmicki S.: *Judo. Historia i metodyka*, Warszawa 2011, p. 42.

In the year 1994 the European Championships took place in Gdańsk. The Poles won six medals. The gold medals winners were Larysa Krauze and Paweł Nastula (Photo 4).



Photo 4. Paweł Nastula – judo legend in Poland
(source: the competitor's own collection)

Apart from Waldemar Legień, Paweł Nastula is another judo legend in Poland. After the European Championships in Gdańsk in 1994, the competitor from Warsaw remained undefeated for 1200 days. His next failure was only in March 1998 when Nastula defeated over 200 competitors⁷. In 1996, in Atlanta Paweł Nastula was a favorite in the 95 kg category.

Rafał Kubacki is also a distinguished figure in Polish judo. He is 17 times Polish Champion, European Champion of 1989 and the silver medalist of 1994 and 1998. He also won five European Championships bronze medals, the World Champion of 1993 and 1997 and the bronze medalist of 1989. He competed in the Olympic Games three times in Barcelona 1992, Atlanta 1996 and Sydney 2000.

Since 1996 Poland has not won the Olympic medal. Przemysław Matyjaszek was the nearest to win the bronze medal, however he lost the fight (Beijing 2008). Paweł Zagrodnik was the fifth and the sixth in 2012.

As aforementioned, from the 18th to 19th of May 1957, First Individual Polish Senior Championships in Judo were organised in Łódź. In subsequent years the championships mostly took place in Gdańsk, Koszalin and Wrocław. In 1992, the 36th Polish Championships were in Gdańsk, from the 10th to 12th of April. The medalists were as follows (the winners of gold, silver and two bronze medals in sequential order):

- Category 60 kg: Piotr Kamrowski, Tomasz Wojdan, Grzegorz Burda and Andrzej Jasiński
- Category 65 kg: Piotr Sadowski, Radosław Laskowski, Mirosław Błachnio and Leszek Strycharz
- Category 71 kg: Zbigniew Kamiński, Krzysztof Wojdan, Wiesław Błach and Marek Krajewski
- Category 78 kg: Tomasz Błoch, Grzegorz Kotliński, Bogdan Bogucki and Marek Wróbel

⁷Glińska J.: *Paweł Nastula- Od mistrzostwa olimpijskiego do MMA- we wspomnieniach mistrza*, [in]: J. Nowocień, K. Zuchora (red.) *Sport w kulturze zdrowia, czasu wolnego i edukacji olimpijskiej w 150-lecie urodzin Pierre'a de Coubertin*: AWF Warszawa 2013, p. 253.

- Category 86 kg: Waldemar Legień, Grzegorz Lech, Daniel Las and Andrzej Pęckiewicz
- Category 95 kg: Paweł Nastula, Mirosław Smaruj, Jacek Beutler and Zbigniew Bielawski
- Category over 95 kg: Rafał Kubacki, Tomasz Tybus, Jacek Gemza and Marek Piłucha.
- Category open: Paweł Nastula, Waldemar Legień, Rafał Kubacki and Wojciech Kaczkan (the author's own study based on the Polish Championships competitions results).

The 40th edition of the Polish Championships took place from the 11th to 13th of October 1996 in Kraków. The medalists were as follows (the winners of gold, silver and two bronze medals in sequential order):

- Category 60 kg: Bogdan Przystarz, Piotr Kamrowski, Artur Brzeziński and Remigiusz Ławniczek
- Category 65 kg: Jarosław Lewak, Robert Zaczekiewicz, Mirosław Błachnio and Mariusz Zubrzycki
- Category 71 kg: Piotr Sadowski, Krzysztof Wojdan, Robert Trędowski and Robert Gnieździński
- Category 78 kg: Cezary Kozłowski, Robert Krawczyk, Bronisław Wołkiewicz and Marek Legień
- Category 86 kg: Artur Kejza, Marek Piłucha, Sylwester Gaweł and Waldemar Bączek
- Category 95 kg: Paweł Nastula, Józef Smóter, Jarosław Poździk and Maciej Zwarycz
- Category over 95 kg: Marek Piłucha, Artur Bodizacki, Paweł Malanowicz and Wojciech Gędzik.
- Category open: Sylwester Gaweł, Artur Bodizacki, Jarosław Poździk and Tomasz Lubas (the author's own study based on the Polish Championships competitions results).

The 44th edition of the Polish Championships took place from the 3rd to 4th of June 2000 in Rybnik without category open, whose competition was held in Bytom on the 26th of June 2000. The medalists were as follows (the winners of gold, silver and two bronze medals in sequential order):

- Category 60 kg: Mateusz Michałek, Adam Skulte, Rafał Libera and Wojciech Wysocki
- Category 66 kg: Jarosław Lewak, Robert Zaczekiewicz, Dariusz Tabisz and Jacek Kamiński
- Category 73 kg: Krzysztof Wiłkomirski, Robert Trędowski, Piotr Sadowski and Sebastian Lewandowski
- Category 81 kg: Bronisław Wołkiewicz, Robert Krawczyk, Waldemar Banaszak and Jarosław Lewandowski
- Category 90 kg: Przemysław Matyjaszyk, Artur Kejza, Piotr Smoliniec and Krzysztof Trzebiatowski
- Category 100 kg: Paweł Sitarski, Tomasz Szewczyk, Jarosław Poździk and Mariusz Jaszewski
- Category over 100 kg: Janusz Wojnarowicz, Ireneusz Kwieciński, Jarosław Jańczak and Grzegorz Eitel
- Category open: Przemysław Matyjaszyk, Janusz Wojnarowicz, Robert Krawczyk and Piotr Golus
(the author's own study based on the Polish Championships competitions results)⁸.

⁸The Polish Championships in judo competitions results – PDF document.

The Olympic Games in Barcelona were exceptional for Polish athletes. Polish Olympics participants took part in the Olympic Games for the first time after the systemic transformation in Poland, which took place in 1989. There were six representatives of Poland in judo and these were:

- Piotr Kamrowski – Flyweight, Polish Champion in 1992, at the Olympic Games he dropped out in repechage stage – finally he was classified on the 9th place;
- Wiesław Błach – Lightweight, Polish Championships bronze medalist in 1992, at the Olympic Games classified on the 7th and 8th places;
- Krzysztof Kamiński – Half-Middleweight, he didn't win any medal At Polish Championships in 1992. At the Olympic Games he dropped out at the qualifying stage and was classified on the 18th place;
- Waldemar Legień - Middleweight, Polish Champion in 1992, the Olympic gold medal;
- Paweł Nastula – Half-Heavyweight, Polish Champion in 1992, the 5th place;
- Rafał Kubacki - Heavyweight, Polish Champion in 1992, dropped out in repechage stage.

The best of the entire Polish representation of judokas was Waldemar Legień. He won the Olympic gold medal in the category 86 kg. The newspaper "Nowiny" commented on Legień's performance: *The splendid attitude of Polish athletes on Olympic arenas was crowned with the final fight of judoka Waldemar Legień with the Frenchman Pascal Tayot, fought in a fantastic style in the weight 86 kg. Legień defended the Olympic gold medal from Seoul and passed into history of Polish judo as the only winner of two Olympic Games*⁹.

The performance of Paweł Nastula did not fulfill the expectations of judo fans. Instead of winning the gold medal, Nastula was the fifth. His performance was also commented on in "Nowiny": *Paweł Nastula was considered one of these Polish judokas who were to stand on the Olympic podium. Not only because he had won vice-championship of the world a year earlier. The judoka of AZS AWF started magnificently. He defeated the Korean Sans-Sik before the scheduled time, he similarly won with the veteran of world judo the Belgian Robert van de Walle (...) the Pole impressed others with his calmness, self-control and above all his throwing techniques, which allowed him to finish his fights before the scheduled time, also with the Mongolian Odvog Baljinnyam.*

*In the most important fight – for the Olympic finals in the weight 95 kg, Nastula met less well-known, but fighting in an awesome way, the 29-year-old Englishman Rymind Stevens. In the initial phase of the fight, Nastula suffered minor, but very painful injury, he did not fight in his style anymore and he lost the fight by decision of the judges. He couldn't accept that for a long time, he lost the fight for the bronze medal with the Ukrainian Siergiejew, taking the fifth place in the final classification*¹⁰.

The Olympic Games in Atlanta lasted from the 19th of July to the 4th of August 1996. There were seven representatives of Poland in judo and these were:

- Piotr Kamrowski - Flyweight, Polish Championships silver medalist in 1996, at the Olympic Games he dropped out in his second fight, finally he was classified on the 18th place;
- Jarosław Lewak - Featherweight, Polish Champion in 1996, at the Olympic Games he dropped out in repechage stage;

⁹Gazeta Codzienna *Nowiny*, 1992, nr 148, p. 2.

¹⁰Gazeta Codzienna *Nowiny*, 1992, nr 148, p. 2

- Krzysztof Wojdan - Lightweight, Polish Championships silver medalist in 1996, in Atlanta he dropped out in the first fight (the second qualifying stage) by ippon in the 49th second and dropped out of the tournament;
- Bronisław Wołkowicz - Polish Championships bronze medalist in 1996, at the Olympic Games he was classified on the 12th place;
- Marek Pisula - Middleweight, Polish Championships silver medalist in 1996, in Atlanta he dropped out in the first fight, finally being classified on the 32nd place;
- Paweł Nastula - Half-Heavyweight, Polish Champion in 1996, he won the Olympic gold medal;
- Rafał Kubacki - Heavyweight, he did not win any medal in Polish Championships in 1996, at the Olympic Games he dropped out in repechage stage.

Paweł Nastula was the only Polish judoka to win the Olympic medal in Atlanta. Reaching the finals was not easy. In the first round of the Olympic tournament he faced the Hungarian Kovacs – defending the Olympic gold medal from Barcelona. The Hungarian submitted the fight after 59 seconds and the armbar used by Polish judoka. In the next fight Nastula was better than the Italian Luigi Guidio. The next opponent, the Portuguese Pedros Soares, managed to fight for 163 seconds only. In semi-finals the Pole competed against the Brazilian Aurelio Miguel, the Olympic champion from Seoul. Several seconds before the end of scheduled fight time Paweł Nastula performed a ‘wazari’ on his rival (wasari – a term used in Japanese sports and martial arts, wazari is scored if the throw is done correctly in 80-90% or if the opponent is held on his back for at least 15-20 seconds), in this way advancing to the finals [3]. In the fight for the Olympic gold medal Paweł Nastula defeated the Korean Kim Min-Soo. The journal “Tempo” commented on this fact: *the hurricane ‘Bertha’ threatened the Olympic Sailing Village in Savannah a few days before the beginning of the Olympic Games. Yesterday, Paweł Nastula, like a typhoon, went through tatami in Atlanta. In the final fight, in the category to 95 kg, he literally swept up the Korean Kim Min-Soo, winning within only 90 second*¹¹. However, “Nowiny” from Rzeszów wrote about the fight: *Paweł Nastula, the one everybody relied on, one of the favourites in the category to 95 kg, won the gold medal in a stunning way (...)*¹².

The fights of the other Polish judokas were not the best. They dropped out either in qualifying fights or in repechage stage.

The Olympic Games in 2000 took place in Sydney and there were four Polish participants: Jarosław Lewak, Robert Krawczyk, Paweł Nastula and Rafał Kubacki. The first of them – Jarosław Lewak fought in the Olympic tournament in the category to 73 kg. In the first round he defeated the Austrian C. Stangl by the throw to earn an ippon: *In the 20th second, Lewak threw the Austrian to his back from the red edging of the mat – ippon!*¹³, while in the second round he lost by strangling with the Japanese K. Nakamura and dropped out of the contest. During Polish Championships Lewak won the gold medal. The second of Poles on the Australian tatami – Robert Krawczyk, fought in the category to 81 kg, already losing in the first round, by ippon, with the Cuban Gabriel Artega therefore dropping out in the first round¹⁴. Krawczyk won the silver medal at Polish Championships. After Robert Krawczyk’s loss, Paweł Nastula was expected to stand on the Olympic podium. Unfortunately, the Polish competitor lost in the first round in the category to 100 kg. He was defeated by the representative of Israel Ariel Zevi, who by dropping out in the next round, did not “help” Nastula to advance to repechage stage¹⁵. Paweł Nastula did not take part in Polish

¹¹Gazeta Codzienna Nowiny 1996, nr 30, p. 12.

¹²Dziennik sportowy Tempo 1996, nr 154, p. 21

¹³Dziennik sportowy Tempo 2000, nr 207, p. 7.

¹⁴Dziennik sportowy Tempo 2000, nr 208, p. 7.

¹⁵Dziennik sportowy Tempo 2000, nr 210, p. 5.

Championships. The last to go out to the Olympic tatami was Rafał Kubacki, who fought in the category to 100 kg. During the Olympic Games he dropped out quickly, he did not participate in Polish Championships.

The two most prominent judokas in the history of judo in Poland took part in competitions in the discussed period. Waldemar Legień won his first gold medal even before the systemic transformation in Poland (1988 – Seoul), the second one in 1992 at the Olympic Games in Barcelona. During his career Waldemar Legień won two Olympic gold medals. Paweł Nastula, on the other hand, celebrated the largest triumph in his professional career in 1996 during the Olympic Games in Atlanta.