

DEVELOPMENT OF THE "SOKÓŁ" GYMNASTIC ASSOCIATION IN MIELEC OVER THE YEARS 1918-1939

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Keywords:

- physical culture
- physical fitness
- "Sokół" Gymnastic Society

Abstract:

After the end of the war, the "Sokół" Gymnastic Society in Mielec continued its activity. It was the organizer of social and sport life of Mielec inhabitants and still awoken among the residents of Mielec fondness for his homeland. "Sokol" took an active part in the reconstruction of the city destroyed by war, they also organized a rally during which a group of volunteers was set up to take part in the Polish-Soviet war. They organized dances for the residents, theater performances and festivities. They put a lot of emphasis on healthy lifestyle and physical fitness. For this purpose, they organized physical exercises and fitness shows.

INTRODUCTION

The "Sokół" Gymnastic Society in Mielec resumed its activity after the end of hostilities. Piotr Kazana took over the function of the President of Gymnastic Society "Sokół". He played a major role in the reorganization of "Sokół" Mielec and also donated the large part of his income for the club. The members of the "TG Sokół" were the citizens of Mielec who were well-respected among the inhabitants, i.e. teachers of junior high schools, merchants and craftsmen, who financially supported the various initiatives of the "Sokół" Mielec. After 1918, new members were joined the "TG Sokół" ranks. The club has still drew attention to gymnastics, organized dance and theater performances. In 1918 the football team "Zorza" was established, which later changed its original name to "Kruki"¹.

The members of "TG Sokół" actively participated in the reconstruction of the war-damaged city. At that time the inhabitants of Mielec were mainly engaged in trade and crafts. Plans from before World War I concerning the construction of sewage and waterworks unfortunately have not been realized.

In 1919, another election was held for the president of "TG Sokół". This time, the bank director Franciszek Rink was appointed to this function.

On the news of the forthcoming Polish-Soviet war and the recruitment of volunteers to the Polish army on July 17, 1920, a rally was organized in Mielec, during which a volunteer legion was formed to participate in the war². A volunteer group was formed mostly from junior high school students. At the end of the rally the volunteers were taken to the station and drove to the front.

Members of the "TG Sokół" had been organizing evening meetings in their club - in the villa Bagatelka, they also met on the sports field where they performed and watched various physical exercises and participated in trials of amateur theater³. Their key word was still fitness and thews. A regular gymnastics lessons were introduced in local gymnasium. They were held three times a week. The significant credit was given by the activist of "TG Sokół" -

¹F. Kiryk : *Mielec - dzieje miasta i regionu*. T.I, Mielec-Rzeszów,1984, s. 593.

² Jednodniówka Komitetu Obchodów 500-lecia Mielca, Mielec 1957, s. 39

³ J. Stępień: *Historia teatru amatorskiego w Mielcu 1887-1939*, Mielec 2014.

Piotr Jasiński, who had proper skill to become a “Sokół” trainer (he completed Lwów arcade training course in 1902 and completed game and play course organized by the school district of Lwów in 1913).



Football team „Kruki”, 1920 r., source: collections of Regional Museum in Mielec.

“TG Sokół” paid great attention to cultural matters and the maintenance of linguistic distinctiveness. This was manifested, among others in promoting the sale of goods by Poles. Throughout the press, inhabitants and club members were provided with information on both policies and activities conducted by other club organizations. The information was mainly about exercises, new ways of doing physical exercises, instructions on gym equipment and theater scenarios. The press also published the gymnastic guide of “Sokół”, which informed about the regulations, statute and organization of “Sokół” organizations in free Poland.

The members of the “Sokół” had a library in which there were many volumes offered by count Mieczysław Rey from Przecław and other donors.

In 1926, they started to build their own sports stadium, which was to be equipped with stands, tennis courts, football pitch and gymnasium. The plan were also to create dressing rooms for athletes and rental of sports equipment. In the summer of 1926 a large ceremony took place in Mielec, involving many “Sokół” teams. The cornerstone for the construction of a new “Sokół” stadium was laid at that time. There was organized a show of local teams on the court and also presented a play “Fat Fish”. During the ceremony took place a football match between the “Kruki” and the Dębica team. For kids, the biggest attraction was the circus and the zoo⁴.

Thanks to the efforts of the members of “TG Sokół”, a monument of Freedom called Kiliński monument was built in Mielec. It was created on the 10th anniversary of regaining independence. The creator of the monument was Boleslaw Prinz, who carved an eagle on the

⁴ J. Ziobroń: *Radomyśl Wielki*, Mielec 1981, s.7.

wood and a bas-relief depicting Jan Kilinski's face. Festival related to the celebration of independence lasted two days and a numerous festivities, dance parties and gym shows took place.



Fitness performance using 5-metres ladder, source: collections of Regional Museum in Mielec.

Thanks to the initiative of Piotr Jasiński, Wiktor Jaderny and Stanisław Działowski, the construction of a tourist airport was started in 1928. Other “Sokół” members were also helping in construction works. It was completed in 1931. The opening ceremony of the airport was attended not only by the inhabitants of the city and surrounding areas, but also delegates of other “Sokół” teams from Małopolska. Arrived guests could admire the planes, and for a small fee they could see the city from the bird's eye view. At the airport was also organized a fitness show of “Sokół” team⁵.

From the early thirties at the “TG Sokół” began to operate “Sokół” Canoe Division. Thanks to the Management Board, composed of: Stanisław Piszczek, Witold Rymanowski and Eugeniusz Dębicki and supporters of water sports, a kayak marina was built. Trainings of the team took place in the afternoons, during the day they were repaired and maintained equipment. The registered Kayak “Sokół” Branch in Mielec became a member of the Polish Canoe Association⁶.

In 1931 the construction of the long-awaited new “Sokół” stadium was completed. Large financial support during the construction was ensured by the successive presidents of the “TG Sokół”: Dr. Lucjan Gaweno and mayor Franciszek Kazan. Unfortunately, after the initial design of the building a fire broke out, which thanks to the rapid reaction of the firefighters was put out. The fire destroyed only the roof, so after the renovation the building was put into use⁷. In the new “Sokół” stadium there were organized a various meetings with the inhabitants of Mielec during holidays, theater performances and national holidays celebrations. Physical exercises were also organized – they practiced athletics and exercise called “pyramids”. In winter, inhabitants could perform ice skating on the new created ice

⁵ Z. Gąska: *Początki i rozwój sportu w Mielcu do 1960 r.*, Warszawa 1978, s.34.

⁶ J. Dębicki: *Oddział Kajakowy Towarzystwa Gimnastycznego „Sokół” (OKS) w Mielcu*, Rocznik Mielecki 2003, s. 249.

⁷ Mielczanin – jednodniówka akademickiego koła mielczan we Lwowie – Sekcji Zrzeszenia Akademickiej Młodzieży, Lwów 1933, s. 21.

rink and also practice skiing on the Cyranowska Mountain. The equipment was purchased by a president F. Kazan. A tobogganing had also many fans. There were also field exercises with weapons. They were led by head of the “Sokół” Ludwik Weryński. Local team gathered every Sunday at 6 am in front of the stadium from where they marched for exercise to the forest on the Smoczka mountain⁸.



Touristic airport in Mielec, 1931 r., source: collections of Regional Museum in Mielec.

In 1932 the sports stadium of Żwirki and Wigury was opened. The stadium was equipped with stands, cloakrooms and tennis courts. In the same year Mielec was incorporated into the Central Industrial District. This led to a large influx of jobseekers. Mielec became an industrial city where people found employment at Polish Airways⁹.

⁸ J.Rysiak: *Działalność Towarzystwa Gimnastycznego „Sokół” w Mielcu w latach 1893-1939*, Rocznik Mielecki 1999, T. II, s. 157.

⁹ J. Kazana: *Towarzystwo Gimnastyczne „Sokół” w Mielcu w latach 1893-2003*, „Nadwiślocze” 2004, nr 1, s. 29.



Opening ceremony of Żwirki and Wigury Stadium in Mielec, 1932 r., source: collections of Regional Museum in Mielec.



Gymnastic show during stadium's opening ceremony, source: collections of Regional Museum in Mielec.

In the thirties, about 130 residents of Mielec belonged to "TG Sokół". From the active youth (group of about 300 people) a representation was formed, which took part in various types of shows, exercises or trips to other teams for the rally, as a representation of Mielec. All ceremonies and exercises prepared by the "Sokół" fixed teams were supervised by the Chief of Staff - L.Weryński¹⁰.

¹⁰ Tamże, s. 29



Permanent Sokol teams, 1934 r., source: collections of Regional Museum in Mielec.

“TG Sokół” also remembered about children. Thanks to the initiative of members of the association, between the “Sokół” team place and the sports stadium, was built a garden of Henryk Jordan, equipped with swings, balls, ropes, scooters and other toys.

In 1936 the “Sokoli” went to Kraków to help with the construction of a mound dedicated to the recently deceased Józef Piłsudski.



Group of Sokol people before going to Cracow to take part in Józef Piłsudski 's mound building, 1936 r., source: collections of Regional Museum in Mielec.

On the occasion of the building the mound, the “Sokół” Kraków team organized many celebrations, including the great show at the sports stadium in Kraków.



The group of Mielec sokol people, source: private collection of Mrs Emilia Żola.

“Sokoli” also visited Krakow and its monuments and Wawel, in which crypt was a glass coffin with Józef Piłsudski's body¹¹.



Mielec citizens in Krakow costumes before the performance at the stadium in Kraków, source: private collection of Mrs. Emilia Żola.

¹¹ Tamże, s. 29.

Each year, on the occasion of the feast of May 3, the young “Sokoli” organized relay races with their neighboring teams. The relay race ran between Mielec, Dębica and Kraków or between Dąbrowa Tarnowska and Mielec. “Sokoli” started their run in Mielec and ended up at Dębica or Dąbrowa Tarnowska.

The last rally of the Gymnastics Society before the Second World War took place in the summer of 1939 in Lwów.



Representation of the Mielec nest in Lwów rally in summer 1939, source: private collection of Mrs. Emilia Żola.



Sokol meeting in Lwow, summer 1939 r., source: collections of Regional Museum in Mielec.

During the rally a solemn mass was celebrated, then fitness shows and folk festivals¹².

On September 1, 1939, Mielec society learned about the outbreak of war. "TG Sokół" involved the inhabitants of Mielec, among others to build shelters. A large group of Mielec "Sokół" members were incorporated into the Polish Army, while the rest joined the Home Army and the guerrilla group "Jędrusia Branch" to fight underground.

¹² J.Rysiak: *Działalność Towarzystwa Gimnastycznego „Sokół” w Mielcu w latach 1893-1939*, Rocznik Mielecki 1999, T. II, s. 158.