

THE ORGANIZATION OF JEWISH SPORTS MOVEMENT IN ŁÓDŹ IN THE YEARS 1945–1949

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Abstract The article presents the determinants shaping and the development of the sports movement of the Jewish people living in Łódź in the first post-war years. When the German troops left the city of Łódź in 1945, the Jewish people started to arrive in the city. The cultural autonomy present in the years 1945–1949 enabled the reactivation of socio-cultural life among the Jews, involving sport. The main factors that affected the development of Jewish sport after WW2 were the Jewish emigration and resettlement to the so called Regained Territories. Until 1949 there were four Jewish sports clubs in Łódź: “Makabi” Jewish Sports Club, the Jewish Chess Club, “Jedność” Jewish Sports Club, “Gwiazda” Jewish Workers Sports Club. Their activities aimed at biological recovery of the Jewish people. The clubs representing the highest sporting level participated in sports associations competitions. The most successful were the chess players from the Jewish Chess Club in Łódź and the table tennis players from “Gwiazda” Jewish Workers Sports Club. The change in the State’s policy towards the Jews and the Stalinisation of Polish sport led to the disappearance of the Jewish clubs. Part of the sportsmen emigrated, others joined the sport model imposed by the Communists. In Łódź the Jewish clubs merged in “Spójnia-Solidarność” Union Sports Club, which was subordinated to “Spójnia” Sports Association.

Key words: Jewish sport, Łódź, the years 1945–1949

Introduction

Until the outbreak of WW2, Łódź was one of the greatest population clusters of the Jewish people in Poland. On the 1st of September 1939 the city of Łódź was inhabited by about 680 thousand people including 230 thousand Jews (33.8%) (Bojanowski, 1992). The extermination of Jews during WW2 resulted in only 7 – 10 thousand of Jews surviving (out of the 230 thousand population) (Siepracka, 2008). While the German troops were leaving Łódź, former residents and repatriates were coming back. Among them there were the residents of Łódź of Jewish origin as well as the Jews from the Eastern Borderlands. For most of them the city of Łódź was just a stopover on their way to their hometowns, settlement of the “Regained Territories” or emigration. In the years 1945 – 1946 Łódź was the greatest agglomeration of the Jewish population in Poland, estimated in 1945 at 29,892 people, that is 37.3% of the Jews in Poland (Rykała, 2010). The Jewish population was characterized by considerable mobility. When, in 1949, the Polish government allowed legal emigration to Israel, the number of Jewish residents in Łódź decreased to 10–15 thousand (Olejnik, 1998; Rykała, 2010). Estimated data indicate that every other third or fourth Jew emigrating

from Poland in the years 1945–1949 was a resident of the city of Łódź. Among the reasons for emigration were the resentment towards the country identified with the Jewish cemetery, Anti-Semitism among part of the Polish population (pogroms in Rzeszów, Kielce, Cracow) (Stola, 2010), search for the surviving family members and the willingness to participate in the formation of the Jewish state.

Among the ethnic minorities inhabiting the city of Łódź, the Jewish people had their specific national autonomy. It was manifested in complex structures of Jewish organizations. The relatively little destruction enabled the city of Łódź to take on the role of the centre of social, political, economic and cultural life of Jews in Poland. In Łódź there were, among others, the headquarters of the Central Jewish History Commission, the Jewish Press Agency and the Union of Jewish Artists, Journalists and Writers in Poland. The city of Łódź housed the Jewish Theatre of Łódź, “Kinor” Film Cooperative as well as Jewish schools. In the years 1945–1949 over 20 titles of the Jewish press were published, political activity was being carried out by 11 Jewish political parties (Olejnik, 1997; Olejnik, 2008). The status quo changed soon after the creation of the State of Israel (1948). The Anti-Semitic course taken by the Soviet Union forced a similar attitude among its satellites. In Poland, the cultural-national autonomy of the Jewish community was limited, what is more, the role of the Central Committee of the Jews was reduced. Finally, in 1949, all the Zionist parties and organizations were liquidated (Redlich, 2012). The culmination of this process was the establishment of the Socio-Cultural Association of the Jews in Poland (TSKŻ) in 1950, an organization with very limited competence subordinated to the Communist authorities (Mizgalski, 2010).

In the years 1945–1949 the city of Łódź was the cradle for the reviving Jewish culture (Olejnik, 1997). The steps undertaken aimed at restoring the relative normality. One of them was the reactivation of the Jewish sports movement. The history of the Jewish sport after WW2 was the subject addressed sporadically. The exceptions are works by R. Urban (Urban, 2010), T. Włodarczyk (Włodarczyk, 2014) and D. Blecking (Blecking, 2001). The issues of the sports movement among the Jewish people in Łódź in the years 1945–1949 were addressed in other publications (Bogusz, 2008; Rykała, 2010). However, the research problem formulated in the title of the study was treated as a contributing factor. The publication made use of research methods such as: synthesis, written sources analysis, induction, deduction and comparative method. The following research questions were discussed:

1. Which factors conditioned the development of Jewish sport in Łódź in the years 1945–1949?
2. Which sports disciplines were of the greatest interest among the Jewish community in the first post-war years?

The paper is a reference work. The source materials come from the State Archive, the Jewish and local press and books on the history of the Jewish community in Poland after WW2.

Results of the research

The first indication of the reviving Jewish sports movement in Łódź was the establishment of the Jewish Sports Club (ŻKS). Despite being associated in the Łódź Regional Football Association (ŁOZPN) after 1946, it did not develop its activity (State Archive in Łódź – APL, National Council Board of the city of Łódź – PRNmŁ, file number 2359, p. 129). The actual reconstruction of Jewish sport in Łódź took place in 1946 alongside with the establishment of the “Makabi” Jewish Sports Club (ŻKS) in Łódź (Jewish Historical Institute Archive – AŻIH, Zionist Organizations – OS, file number 7, p. 1) and the Jewish Chess Club (Archive of New Files in Warsaw – AAN, Polish Chess Association – PZSz, file number 20.9, no pagination). In 1947 the following were founded: “Gwiazda” Jewish Workers Sports Club (ŻRKS) (“Ekspress Ilustrowany”, 1947, no. 237) and “Jedność” Jewish Sports Club (“Dziennik

Łódzki” 1047, no. 296, “Ekspress Ilustrowany”, 1947, no. 296). The negative opinion issued by the Voivodeship Public Security Office (WUBP) in Łódź made it impossible to register “Bar-Kochba” Sports Club (The Institute of National Remembrance, Branch Office in Łódź – IPNOŁ, The Voivodeship Department of Public Security in Łódź – WWBWŁ, file number IPN Lgpf 10.690 volume 1, p. 19).

In the years 1945 – 1949 the activities propagating sport among the Jewish people of the city of Łódź were conducted by four clubs. They offered to their members physical activities such as boxing, gymnastics, basketball, athletics, football, swimming, volleyball, chess and table tennis. Teams sports gained the greatest popularity. Demonstrating the highest sporting level they participated in the following tournaments: ŁOZPN (“Gwiazda” ŻRKS, “Jedność” ŻKS), in Łódź Regional Chess Association (The Jewish Chess Club) and in Łódź Regional Boxing Association (“Gwiazda” ŻRKS, “Jedność” ŻKS).

Jewish clubs struggled with organizational problems similar to those of Polish sports clubs. The lack of funding, shortage of sports equipment and skilled training staff were commonplace. The existing club venues needed major repair. The worst impediments to the systematic running of sports training specific to the Jewish environment were emigration and resettlements to the Regained Territories among the Jewish people.

The first to face these problems were the activists from the “Makabi” Jewish Sports Club in Łódź (AŻIH, OS, file number 547, k. 1). The club was opened on the 16th of May 1946 by its pre-war members: Adam Wałach, Lejba Solarz, Jan Dobrzecki, Ignacy Feldon, Mieczysław Zajbert, Ludwik Chęciński, Ignacy Fryszman, Adam Feldom, Leon Zybersztajn, Zygmunt Widawski, Szymon Rogoziński, Jakub Kempirski, Dawid Ruszecki, Rubin Fein, Zygmunt Sztrauchai, Józef Kronman (APŁ, PRNmł, file number 2358, p. 278). Despite the negative opinion issued by WUBP in Łódź (IPNOŁ, WWBWŁ, file number Lg pf 10.690 volume 1 part I, p. 19), which pointed to the “Makabi” sympathizing with the right-wing “Ychud” Zionist Democratic Union Party (ZSD), on the 10th of August 1946 the “Makabi” ŻKS in Łódź statute was approved (APŁ, PRNmł, file number 2358, p. 276).

The migration of the administration members of the “Makabi” in 1946 was the reason for suspending its activities (APŁ, PRNmł, file number 2358, p. 269). Consequently, the club was not included in the records of the Central Committee of the Jews in Poland (AŻIH, OH, file number 549, p. 100). The second re-establishment took place in 1947 (“Opinia” 1947, no. 13; Ekspress Ilustrowany” 1947, no. 69). The following were elected to the new Board: L. Chęciński, Zajbert, L. Dobrzecki, Wajskopf, Gutentag and Henryk Zglinowicz (APŁ, District Board of the National Council in Łódź – Śródmieście (Łódź – Midtown) – PDRNŁŚ, file number 723, p. 316). In 1948 the members of the last board included: Zajbert (chairman), Szapiro (Vice-Chairman), Pacanowski (Financial Secretary), Maier and Rozanykwiat (sports managers), Artman (Secretary), and Mowszowicz (Host) (APŁ, PRNmł, file number 2358, p. 232). The club owned two facilities: Secretary’s Office at Zachodnia Street 20 (AŻIH, OS, file number 458, p. 15; “Ekspress Ilustrowany” 1947, no. 69) and a field with a six-room wooden building on the Sterling Street 2 (APŁ, PDRNŁŚ, file number 733, p. 316). Their renovation took up most of the funds available. The main source of financing came from membership fees, subsidies from the Central Committee of the Jews in Poland, the “Ichud” Zionist-Democrats Union (AŻIH, OS, file number 458, p. 63) and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (Joint) (AŻIH, OS, file number 457, pp. 4, 7, 9).

The “Makabi” ŻKS propagated amateur physical activity whose aim was to regenerate life forces necessary to build their own state in Palestine. This aim was confirmed by the Statute which pointed to the popularization of amateur sport, physical education and social life among its members. The “Makabi” membership could be obtained by an adult after gaining the support of two members, by the youth (15–28 years) with the parental or legal

guardians consent and compliant with the “ Association Law” from 1932 by an active duty soldier (AŻIH, OS, file number 456, p. 1). In the years 1946 – 1949 the “Makabi” ŻKS comprised of 80 members (AŻIH, OS, file number 457, p. 1).

The majority of those joining the club were people under the age of 18. Among 97 applications only 15 pointed to any pre-war sports activities. Three of the applicants were qualified instructors (football, athletics). The disciplines which gained the greatest popularity were team sports: volleyball, football and basketball (AŻIH, OS, file number 459, pp. 1–105). The sections started in 1946 were as follows: volleyball, basketball, Swedish school of gymnastics for men, and table tennis (APŁ, PDRNŁŚ, file number 723, p. 346). In 1947 the club extended its activities to the boxing section (“Opinia” 1947, no. 13). In 1948 they started the following sections: chess, athletics and football (juniors) (APŁ, PRNmł, file number 2358, p. 253).

Due to the renovation works in the facilities the physical activities took place in the open air (APŁ, PDPNŁŚ, file number 723, p. 316) That was the reason for their seasonal suspension (November – April). Teams sports and gymnastics training classes were run by qualified instructors: L. Stalarz (Solarz) and Fr. Kępińska. Table tennis classes, due to the lack of equipment and the hall, were organized in the “snif” building, that is Łódź branch of “Ichud” ZSD (AŻIH, OS, file number 547, pp. 1, 4, 6–9) and then in their own building at Zachodnia Street 20. A meeting of ping-pong players from “Maccabi” and the veterans’ organization “Maawak” took place in the “Ichudu” hall. This, as a consequence, in December 1946, led to the “Maawak” table tennis section affiliated to “Ychud” ZKS taking on the name the “Makabi” Jewish Sports Club (AŻIH, OS, file number 548, pp. 65, 67), and it was submitted to ŁOZTS. The section activities were managed by Z. Inzelsztajn and the members were as follows: Wolf Szapszonowicz, Adam Becher, Lolek Zybersztajn, Jakob Sznajner, Karol Majer, Leon Mazur, Abe Gutenberg, Marek Milsztajn and Lutek Czarny (AŻIH, OS, file number 547, pp. 45, 66). Z. Inzelsztajn’s activities were of formal nature. The financial dependence on “Ichud” ZSD made the tennis players still perform under the name “Ichud” ŻKS. In the ŁOTS tournaments the “Makabi” ŻKS contestants were not successful. In team championships in 1947 they were classified in the 8th place (12 teams) (“Ekspress Ilustrowany” 194 no. 30, 1947, no. 44).

The “Makabi” ŻKS was active until the 26th of May 1948. The President of Łódź, Eugeniusz Stawiński, justified the decision to liquidate by the club’s “cessation of operations”. The person appointed to terminate “Makabi” activities was Mieczysław Falkiewicz (the manager of the Section of Physical Culture of the Voivodeship Physical Education and Military Training). The appeals against the city authorities’ decision were not successful. The change occurred in the position of the liquidator, where Falkiewicz was replaced by Anatol Wertheim an activist of the Voivodeship Jewish Committee in Łódź, then the Central Committee of the Jews in Poland. The closure was finalized in 1950 (APŁ, PRNmł, file number 2358, p. 258). On the 24th of December 1951 the “Makabi” Jewish Sports Club was removed from the Associations Register (APŁ, PRNmł, file number 2358, p. 220).

In 1946 the activities were undertaken by the Jewish Chess Club (ŻKSz). It continued the pre-war traditions of the Łódź Chess Game Enthusiasts Association, which brought together 90% of the players of Jewish origin. The turmoil of war spared Izaak Grynfeld, a pre-war member of the Board of the Regional Chess Association in Łódź. In the years 1946–1948 he was a manager of Games and Discipline Department of Łódź Regional Chess Association (AAN, PZSz, file number 20/9, no pagination).

In 1946 the Jewish Chess Club comprised of the following members: Izaak Grynfeld, J. Szapiro, Aleksander Goldestejn, M. Lewkowicz, R. Korenfeld, J. Iwicz, J. Kleczewski and Hampel. The Jewish Chess Club belonged to Łódź Regional Chess Association (ŁOZSz), the two leading players: I. Grynfeld and Dr. Marek Szapiro, belonged to

the Polish Chess Association (AAN, PZSz, file number 20/9, no pagination). The highest level was represented by Izaak Grynfeld. In 1946 he took the third place (ex equo with K. Plater) in the first post-war Polish Championships in chess in Sopot ("Szachista Polski, 1946, no. 9–10; 1947, no. 11–12). In the years 1946–1947, together with the representatives of the city of Łódź, he won twice in team championships of Poland (AAN, PZSz, file number 20/9, no pagination; "Szachista Polski" 1946, no. 9–10, 1947, no. 11–12). ŻKSz players were among the best in ŁOZSz. In 1947 the team comprising of: I. Grynfeld, Szapiro, Lewkowicz, Leszczyński, Iwicz, Kleczewski, Goldstein and Konfeld, won the team championships of ŁOZSz ("Szachista Polski" 1947, no. 3, 4). The title guaranteed participation in ŁOZSz "A" class competitions (APŁ, PDRNŁŚ, file number 723, p. 385; "Ekspress Ilustrowany" 1947, no. 107; 1947, no. 107). In individual championships of ŁOZSz in 1947, I. Grynfeld won the vice – championship being second only to J. Piechota from Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Łódź.

The year 1948 saw the significant limitation of the ŻKS activities. After the championship of the city of Łódź, with the participation of one ŻKSz representative (APŁ, PDRNŁŚ, file number 723, p. 381) the club ceased its activities. Some of the members changed clubs, among them Aron Lewkowicz, who joined the YMCA club in Łódź (AAN, PZSz, file number 20/9 no pagination). I. Grynfeld left for Warsaw where he worked for "Szachy" magazine and he was a secretary of the Polish Chess Association, after that of the Chess Section of the Central Committee of Physical Education.

1947 in Łódź saw the foundation of: "Jedność" Jewish Sport Club and "Gwiazda" Jewish Workers Sports Club. It coincided with the termination of the activities of "Makabi" table tennis players (being active in the reports under the name of "Ichud" which means "unity" in Hebrew). In the newborn ŻKS "Unity" the following sections were created: football, sports games, boxing, table tennis, and in 1948, chess and swimming sections were founded. According to Plockier Monachem and Józef Bersztel who were the "Jedność" ŻKS delegates to the national sports conference in 1948, the club activities came up against numerous obstacles such as the lack of their own premises, their own funds and, above all, "the lack the youth enjoying practicing sport". The club gathered 47 members. The highest level was demonstrated by the footballers who participated in "C" class games of the Łódź Regional Football Association (ŁOZPN), and table tennis players in "B" class ŁOZTS (AŻIH, the Central Committee of Jews in Poland – CKŻP, Youth Department – WM, file number 26, pp. 14, 26–27; "Ekspress Ilustrowany", 1949, no. 83).

Another Jewish club established in 1947 in Łódź was "Gwiazda" ŻRKS ("Przełom", 1947, No. 8 – 9). In the years 1948 – 1949 it was the strongest multi-section club associating the Jewish people. It propagated football, table tennis and boxing among its members. The highest level was demonstrated by the tennis players who, in 1948, won the "B" class ŁOZTS team vice-championship and were promoted to the "A" class ("Ekspress Ilustrowany", 1949, No. 303). In 1949 "Gwiazda" table tennis section and "Jedność" ŻKS table tennis section merged under the structures of "Spójnia – Solidarność" Union Sports Club ("Ekspress Ilustrowany", 1949, No. 303).

The changes in physical culture following a resolution by the Central Committee Political Bureau of the Polish United Workers' Party concerning "physical culture and sport" from the 28th September 1949 (Szymański, 1996), broke the native traditions of the sports movement and it was adjusted to the model implemented in the Soviet Union. The Jewish clubs which previously were under the auspices of the Voivodeship and District Jewish Committees were submitted under the supervision of the "Solidarność" Central Crafts Cooperative. In 1949 they applied for admission into "Spójnia" Sports Association. On the 28th June 1949, after the merger of "Gwiazda" ŻRKS with "Jedność" ŻKS in Łódź, the "Spójnia – Solidarność" Union Sports Club was established (AŻIH, CKŻP, file number 26, p. 58). The games under the structures of "Solidarność" were continued by the chess players (AAN,

PZSz, file number 36, no pagination) and table tennis players ("Ekspres Ilustrowany". 1949, No. 303). Gradually, the distinctiveness of the Jewish sport was disappearing. Another emigration wave and accepting into the clubs members of all nationalities resulted in the clubs losing their ethnic identity. The Jewish sportspeople remaining in Poland joined the sports movement mainstream imposed by the Communists.

Summary

The revival of the Jewish sport in the city of Łódź after 1945 was possible as a result of the comeback of the previous residents and an influx of a large number of Jewish repatriates from the Soviet Union. Until 1949 the Jewish population in Poland, as the only ethnic minority, had their cultural autonomy, which enabled the reactivation of the Jewish sports movement in the city of Łódź. The first and unsuccessful attempt was the foundation of the Jewish Sports Club (football) in 1945. In the years 1946 – 1949 in Łódź the sports activities were carried out by four Jewish clubs: "Makabi" Jewish Sports Club (1946), Jewish Chess Club (1946), "Jedność" Jewish Sports Club (1947) and "Gwiazda" Jewish Workers Sports Club (1947). In the clubs' sections Jews practiced boxing, basketball, volleyball, table tennis, gymnastics, chess, athletics, swimming and football. The highest sporting level was represented by the chess players from the Jewish Chess Club in Łódź and table tennis players from "Gwiazda" Jewish Workers Sports Club.

The shift in the State authorities' policy towards the Jewish population after 1948 and the changes adjusting Polish physical culture to the model functioning in the Soviet Union led to the disappearance of the Jewish sports movement in Łódź. Jewish clubs were deprived of their traditional names. Consolidated into "Spójnia – Solidarność" Union Sports Club, they were subordinated to the "Spójnia" Sports Association. Being part of the unified national sports movement they lost their Jewish character.

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