

Football in occupied Poland (1939-1945)

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Summary. This article presents the history of football in Poland during World War II – the most dramatic period in the country's history (even considering its dramatic history in general). The research covers three aspects of football history in occupied Poland, during the period of World War II: official football games, presenting not only national and league games but also the tragic fate of Polish players forced (?) to wear German football jerseys during the occupation; unofficial games, telling an unbelievable story of football matches played in the concentration camps and oflag; illegal games, indicating circumstances under which Poles continued to play football despite severe punishments intended for any sport activities conducted in the occupied country. The article describes the unknown and dramatic history of football and sports in general in occupied Poland, providing the details that the widely known literature fails to mention. It is believed that this aspect of Poland's and the world's history is worthy of further investigation and dissemination.

Keywords: football; World War II; Poland; occupation

El futbol a la Polònia ocupada (1939-1945)

Resum. Aquest article presenta la història del futbol a Polònia durant la Segona Guerra Mundial – el període més dramàtic en la història del país (fins i tot considerant la seva dramàtica història en general). La recerca comprèn tres aspectes de la història del futbol a la Polònia ocupada durant la Segona Guerra Mundial: els partits oficials de futbol, incloent-hi no sols els partits de la lliga i la selecció sinó també el tràgic destí dels jugadors polonesos que es van veure obligats a portar l'uniforme alemany durant l'ocupació; partits no oficials, amb la increïble història de partits de futbol jugats en camps de concentració i camps per a oficials; partits il·legals, indicant les circumstàncies en què els polonesos van continuar jugant a futbol malgrat els càstigs severos que pesaven sobre qualsevol activitat esportiva que es fes en el país ocupat. L'article descriu la desconeguda i dramàtica història del futbol i els esports en general a la Polònia ocupada, tot proporcionant detalls que la bibliografia més coneguda no menciona. Creiem que aquest aspecte de la història de Polònia i del món és mereixedor de més investigacions i difusió.

Paraules clau: futbol; Segona Guerra Mundial; Polònia; ocupació

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Background, objectives and methods

This paper is aimed at presenting the history of football in occupied Poland during World War II. It shall cover all aspects of football matches played in the years of 1939-1945 in the Polish territory (where we consider the Polish territory to be the territory of Poland in 1939); other events are presented only for the purpose of enriching the overall discourse.

Poland was the first country invaded by III Reich. On the morning of September 1st 1939, Polish territory was attacked by German armies, supported by Slovakian army «Bernolak», following the plans of «Fall Weiss». Poland, abandoned by its «allies» – Great Britain and France, who did not really even try to help – defended itself for over one month. However, after the Soviet Union's aggression (following the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement) on September 17th, 1939, it was a hopeless fight.

Poland became an occupied territory for almost the next six years, but despite the Germans' and Soviets' terror, it did not surrender. The Polish resistance and underground army (Armia Krajowa) were the strongest of any resistance movements in Europe.

On May 8th, 1945, Poland became «independent» again. Again betrayed by Western «allies» – this time during the Jalta conference (February 4th-11th, 1945) – Poland did not achieve real independence after II World War, being fully dependent on the Soviet Union. This state of affairs only changed in 1989.

The purpose of this study is not only to present the unique way of playing football during the occupation, but also to allow the reader to understand the unique circumstances in which sport competition took place, and to shed more light on the specific impact of politics on sport and sportsmen in occupied Poland.

We are thus going to present:

- official football games, presenting not only national and league games but also the tragic fate of Polish players (among others, Ernest Wilimowski, one of the best football players in history, who scored four goals against Brazil in the 1938 World Championship) forced (?) to wear German football jerseys during the occupation;
- unofficial games, telling an unbelievable story of football matches played in the concentration camps and oflags;
- illegal games, indicating the circumstances under which Poles continued to play football despite severe punishments inflicted for any sport activity conducted in the occupied country (it is worth noting that Poland was the only country where any mass physical activity was penalized by the Nazis).

The article lays bare the unknown and dramatic history of football and sports in general in occupied Poland, providing the details that the widely known literature fails to mention. It is believed that this aspect of Poland's and the world's history is worthy of investigation and dissemination.

The article is based on the subject bibliography

available (mainly Polish, considering that the subject is not broadly analyzed by foreign academics); former football players and concentration camp prisoners' writings; and materials of concentration camp museums.

1. Official football

The period of 1939-1945 was not the best time to play football. The hecatomb of the most tragic and cruel war made the majority of people forget about official sports competitions.

There were, however, some exceptions.

Regular football competitions continued to be hosted in the III Reich and its allied countries: Italy, Croatia, Romania, Finland and Hungary. Periodic football games were also played in the Soviet Union, but only until June 1941, when the country was invaded by the Nazis after breaking the alliance established by the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact in 1939.

The III Reich, its allies and some neutral countries met on the football pitch, playing friendly matches quite regularly, e.g.:

- against Czech and Moravia Protectorate, 1939 in Breslau
- against Slovakia, 1939 in Chemnitz (3:1), 1941 in Breslau (4:0), 1942 in Bratislava (5:2)
- against Romania, 1940 in Frankfurt (9:3), 1941 in Bucharest (4:1), 1942 in Bytom (7:0)
- against Finland, 1940 in Leipzig (13:0) and 1941 in Helsinki (6:0)
- against Croatia, 1941 in Vienna (5:1) and 1942 in Stuttgart (5:1 again)
- against Denmark, 1941 in Dresden (1:1)
- against Switzerland, 1942 (5:3)

The Polish national team as a whole, of course, did not play any games during World War II. Nevertheless, some of the Polish players did.

Poland was the only country where any mass physical activity was penalized by the Nazis (Chemicz 1982). But it did not bear the same significance to all sportsmen and players.

The main exception was made in Silesia, which was treated by the Nazis as an integral part of the III Reich. Regular league games – *Gauliga* – were held in the Silesian region during all six years of World War II. Additionally, Silesian teams participated in the German football cup, Tschammer Pokal (named after the German sports minister, Hans von Tschammer und Osten). Among football teams competing in *Gauliga* there were some with a proud sporting history: 1.FC Kattowitz (before 1939, the team made of the German minority in Poland, Polish championship runner up in 1927) with former Polish national team players, such as Erwin Nyc, Ewald Dytko and Ernest Wilimowski; Germania Königshütte (previously AKS Chorzów), with Leonard Piątek and goalkeeper Werner Janik; Bismarckhütter Ballspiel Club (previously Ruch Wielkie Hajduki – one of the most successful Polish teams both before and after World War II) and Turn und Sportverein from

Lipiny (formerly known as Naprzód Lipiny), which even reached the semifinals of Tschammer Pokal in 1942, losing however against TSV 1860 Monachium 0:6.

There were also examples of arranged quasi-international football matches in the Polish territory, e.g. the Governorship General team playing against the Silesia team on August 4th, 1940, in Warsaw (won by the latter 5:1), with many of the former Polish national team stars on its squad, e.g. Wilhelm Gora and Karol Pazurek on the GG team and Erwin Nyc, Leonard Piątek, Ryszard Piec on the Silesia team (Urban 2011).

As simple as it may seem, it was very far from it. The choice of Polish football players to continue their sports careers in respective German teams was not effortless and straightforward. Despite the fact that Polish prime-minister-in-exile Władysław Sikorski, bishop Stanisław Adamski and the Polish national team coach Józef Kałuża all advised their fellow citizens to feign loyalty to the German occupiers in order to protect the Polish national interests (Urban 2011), the decision to join a German team was often treated as a sign of betrayal and collaboration with the enemy.

In some of the instances that was the case – among the betrayers there were Polish basketball player Jan Sawicki, Warsaw «Polonia» football player Karol Pazurek, Wisła Kraków goalkeeper Emil Folga (who became a Gestapo agent), and wrestler Brunon Cymmer. An example mentioned often is that of Fryderyk Scherfke – a Poznań «Warta» football player and the scorer of the first Polish goal in the World Championships of 1938 against Brazil during the World Cup in France.

Scherfke's case is, however, a bit more complex. As he felt himself to be German it was not unusual that he signed the *Volkstlist* (the list confirming loyalty towards Germany), right after the Germans took over Poznań. He did not, however, betray his former country and together with it, his colleagues. Quite to the contrary, it is said that he rather utilized his newly acquired contacts to help his former friends. As a result, he prevented the Polish national team goalkeeper Marian Fontowicz and players Stanisław Krajna, Bolesław Gendera and Michał Flieger from being sent to Germany for compulsory work (Urban 2011).

Very complex was also the history of Wilhelm Gora, Cracovia Kraków football player, a participant in the 1936 Olympics and 1938 World Cup who – after signing the *Volkstlist* – became the player of DTSG Krakau. He was called to service in Wehrmacht in Italy, where later on, as a captive, he joined Polish II Corps of general Władysław Anders. He died in Germany in 1975 (Pasko 2012).

There were other cases, however. Many Polish players decided to play on German teams in order to secure their futures and those of their families. Erwin Nyc joined FC Kattowitz after the threat of being sent to Auschwitz concentration camp. Ernest Wilimowski was the best Polish football player before 1939. He scored four goals against Brazil in the 1938 World Cup – the first football player who scored four goals in one World

Cup game and the only one who did it against Brazil – and 112 goals in 88 matches played for the Ruch Wielkie Hajduki team. He is said to have joined a German team to protect his mother from being sent to Auschwitz as well (Godlewski 2006).

Ernest Wilimowski played not only on German league teams (FC Kattowitz, Polizei SV Chemnitz and TSV 1860 Monachium) but also on the German national team (scoring 13 goals in eight games, making his tremendous debut in the Germany-Romania (4:1) game in June 1941, where he scored two goals – the first one as early as the third minute). He is the best known Polish player to have worn a football jersey with swastika on it. There were, however, two others - Richard Kubus and Ernst Plener (Smolorz 2006).

Wilimowski's story is very remarkable. His football career in a German jersey was perceived as a clear sign of betrayal. Already in 1945, when a new Polish government decided to exclude any Germans and their collaborators from public life, including sports life, Wilimowski was officially convicted and treated as a German collaborator. He never came back to Poland, settling down in Germany where he died in 1997 at the age of 81. To explain the atmosphere in Poland and Polish sport in those days, I refer to the following newspaper heading: «Do czego to prowadzi. Nie chcemy Niemców w sporcie śląskim» [Where it is heading. We do not want Germans in the Silesian sport], Trybuna Robotnicza, November 18th, 1945 (Smolorz 2006); where «germans» is written in small letters on purpose. The Silesian Football Organization's (Śląski Okręgowy Związek Piłki Nożnej) resolution from March 25th, 1945, excluded from any official sport organization any player and any activist involved in it during the German occupation (Smolorz 2006).

Nevertheless, some of Wilimowski's colleagues paid a much higher price for making similar decisions. Leonard Malik, a player of Pogoń Katowice and the Polish national team before 1939, died in a concentration camp in Mysłowice, set up by the Polish government in 1945; Ryszard Piec, one of the players of the Turn and Sportverein Lipiny team (also playing in the German cup semifinals against TSV 1860 Monachium) was imprisoned in a similar camp in Świętochłowice; and Karol Pazurek died as a German Wehrmacht soldier shot by Polish partisans in 1945 (Urban 2011).

2. Unofficial football

Additionally to the above mentioned, there were much more tragic stories during World War II, also present in the sports scene of the time.

German soldiers and Polish teams played occasional football games, such as the one in Rybnik, in the spring of 1943, where the Poles defeated the SS football team, or in Lvov in July of 1944, where the Polish team won against the Wehrmacht team 4:2 (Urban, 2006). Those were, however, incidents bearing no major significance.

The case was different when it came to football

games played in concentration camps. The games, especially documented in memoirs of its prisoners, had immense importance, even if being played only occasionally. They helped sustain the sense of humanity and self-esteem of the prisoners held captive in these dehumanized death factories created by the Nazis in Poland.

Oflag II D Gross-Born was created in 1942 and was intended for Polish officers moved from Arnswalde and Neubrandenburg. The prisoners, treated much better than in the concentration camps, were allowed to play football and tennis, even forming semi-official clubs, such as «Legia», «Pogoń», «Warta», TS «Wisła» and «Wilno».

Similarly, in Oflag II C Woldenberg, thanks to Red Cross and YMCA support, the prisoners were able to set up football pitches (there were 15 of them in this big oflag, where up to 6000 prisoners were kept at once) and other sport arenas. It was also there that Polish prisoners formed clubs such as: KS «Kresy», KS «Lwów», KS «Orle», KS «Warta», KS «Wawel» and RKS «Skra».

Similar football games were also played in concentration camps, e.g. in Gross Rosen (Rogoźnica), where even an almost regular league was created (Skoraczyński 1984). The teams included former professional Polish players: Zygmunt Stolarski, «Karp» from Łódzki Klub Sportowy, Marian Gadaj from Lechia Tomaszów, Czesław Skoraczyński from Pogoń Lwów, and Warsaw «Skra» goalkeeper Kazimierz Burkacki. They were initially formed in line with the work functions of the prisoners, e.g. Steinbruch (workers of quarries) and Bauleitung (construction workers), or by German functional prisoners, e.g. «Kaki-Manschaft», «Rapid I» and «Rapid II», «Helden», «Löwen-Wilde» or «Denst». By 1943, when the number of prisoners in the concentration camp significantly increased, the contest turned into an international competition, where Polish, German, Czech and Soviet teams played against each other. In some Gross Rosen subdivisions there were football games played by Italian (in AL Kittlitzreben – Trzebień), Polish and Hungarian Jews (Hirschberg – Jelenia Góra).

When writing about the football games in Gross Rosen, former concentration camp inmates all stated the same: playing football was a unique opportunity to feel like a human being again; it was the only moment when all people in that evil place were equal.

Things were different, however, once the final whistle of the match had blown. Only a few hours after the game won by Polish prisoners against the SS team of the Gross Rosen concentration camp (1:0) and shortly after drinking beer together (sic!), all of the prisoners were heavily beaten (some of them – to death) by their German torturers. Similarly, right after the game in AL Fünfteichen (Miłoszyce, close to Jelcz Las-kowice) where the SS team were defeated by the Hungarian prisoners, the Hungarian goalkeeper was killed. The official reason was because he was trying to escape; in reality, though, it was because he humiliated the German forwards by defending their shots with ease.

Football games were even played in Auschwitz KL, where over 50 Polish professional football players were imprisoned during World War II (among others: Antoni Łyko from Wisła Kraków, Gustaw Bator from Garbarnia Kraków, Adam Kniola from Warta Poznań and Warszawianka). There is still not much information available about these games; however, it is known that in one of the matches played, Polish prisoners defeated the «kapo» team 5:3, in the game played in July 1943 (Urban, 2011) – the game of honor and hope. This game was played in the summer of 1941 (Ryn & Kłodziński, 1973).

It was not the only football match played in Auschwitz. The first games happened already in the autumn of 1940, while in 1943-1944 the games were played quite regularly, with seven or nine representatives of different prisoners' groups competing against each other.

The games were played next to or even on the execution square, where one goal was made from the gallows while the other one was the firing squad wall. Football was even played in the crematories (Ryn & Kłodziński, 1973).

It is worth noting that not only football was played in German concentration camps and oflags during World War II.

In the Olympic year of 1940, the International Prisoner Olympic Games were organized in stalag XII A Langwasser, near Nuremberg. The illegal games, inaugurated on August 31st, 1940, gathered English, French, Polish and Yugoslavian prisoners to compete in sports such as cycling (where instead of a bicycle they used hospital chairs) and shot put (using a stone).

The Olympic year of 1944 celebrated the Games being organized in oflags II D Gross-Born and II C Woldenberg. The Gross-Born Olympic Games took place from July 30th to September 15th, 1944, and the Polish prisoners competed in track and field, football and volleyball. The Woldenberg Games were held from July 23rd to August 13th, 1944. As many as 370 prisoners competed in 16 sports, including 100m, 4x100m, 3x1000m track, long jump, football, volleyball, boxing, table tennis and chess. Some of them achieved strong results, e.g. lieutenant Sprężyk-Widawski ran 100 meters in 11.5 seconds.

Apart from the physical contests, there were also literature, music and art competitions organized in both oflags, in line with an old tradition.

The Olympic traditions were also kept alive by the Olympic calls being played in the opening and closing ceremonies and the presentation of the Olympic banner tailored with sheets and colorful scarfs (Guz, 2012)

It is worth noting that both Olympic tournaments were organized with the approval of the Germans, who did not interfere, except from preventing some sports, such as archery and pole vault, due to the fear that the equipment could be used for the purpose of fighting or escaping (sic!).

One must admit that the decision to allow the games is very surprising, taking into consideration the

Germans' restrictive policy against any sporting activity in Poland.

3. Illegal football

September 1st, 1939, was the day that initiated one of the most tragic and cruel periods in Polish history, also heavily affecting Polish sport. During six years of World War II over one thousand Polish sportsmen, including over 50 Olympians, were killed (Tuszyński, 1993).

Among the sportsmen killed by the Nazis were: a silver medalist of the 1924 Olympics and a cyclist, Tomasz Stankiewicz and a famous Polish runner, Janusz Kusociński – both shot in Palmiry in June 1940; Józef Noji, a runner and a participant in the 1936 Berlin Olympics; Bronisław Czech, a multiple-time Poland skiing champion – both killed in Auschwitz KL; Eugeniusz Lokajski, a spearman and a soldier of the Polish Underground (Armia Krajowa) killed during the Warsaw Uprising of 1944; and Stanisław Skarżyński, a pilot killed during his service in the RAF in 1942.

Polish sportsmen were also exterminated by the Soviets. Among thousands of Polish officers murdered in Katyn, there were: Zdzisław Kawecki-Gozdawa, a silver medalist of the Berlin Olympics, Waclaw Znajdowski, a chairman of the Polish Track and Field Association and 240 other soldiers – sportsmen, including football players Adam Kogut from Cracovia Kraków and Marian Spoida, the second coach of the Polish national team in 1938 World Cup.

Poland was the only country in which the Nazis prohibited any mass physical activity under the threat of death. All Polish (and obviously Jewish) sports associations in occupied Poland were delegalized already on September 2nd, 1939, by the Germans. According to the Governor General's sports proxy decision, the Polish were «not allowed to conduct any organized sport activity», as «playing a game can be treated as a crime and should be penalized» (Chemicz, 1982)

Numerous Polish sportsmen (especially football players) did not, however, give up. Football traditions were cultivated in the biggest cities, Krakow being a case in point.

The first illegal football game in occupied Poland was played on October 22nd, 1939, between Wisła Kraków and Krowdrza. On May 5th, 1940, the eternal competition between Wisła Kraków and Cracovia continued, this time in the underground – the game was won by the former 3:0. On August 7th, 1940, the underground Kraków championship was inaugurated – initially in the Juvenia stadium, and as of 1941 in the nearby villages (Chemicz 1982). On June 14th, 1942, in Bronowice near Kraków, Wisła won 2:0 against Garbarnia, to the amusement of the over 1500 spectators following the game (sic!). The Kraków club even played away games in April 1943 against the Warsaw club (the game ended with a draw 1:1) and the Piaseczno team (winning 3:1). Surprisingly, they were able to overcome all the obstacles existing in the occupied country and smuggle sports equipment both ways (Chemicz 1982).

Warsaw had its underground leagues as well. The first one was organized by a former Polonia Warszawa player – Józef Ciszewski (Mistrzostwa Pola Mokotowskiego) already a few months after the outbreak of World War II (Gawkowski 2001). The next one was in the autumn of 1940 – held in the Polonia stadium and joined by 16 different teams (Gawkowski 2001). There was even the Warsaw Football Association that came into existence at the end of 1941 with the aim of coordinating further football tournaments, played usually in cities near Warsaw: Gołków, Piaseczno, Konstancin. In spite of the security measures undertaken by the organizers, some of the games had tragic consequences: during one of the games played in 1943 in Konstancin, German soldiers killed few of the supporters, and the same year a few of Polonia football players heading to the game in Milanówek were captured by the Germans and sent straight to Auchwitz KL (Gawkowski, 2001).

Illegal football tournaments also existed in other cities, e.g. Kielce – where there was also a Jewish team that played in the league organized in the summer of 1940 (Urban, 2011).

It is natural to say that for the Jews sport was one of the last things on their minds during the hecatomb of World War II, but even they tried to continue sports traditions maintained so strongly in Poland before 1939. It is known that in the Vilnius ghetto 1,000 sportsmen practiced in 28 sport sections, trying to forget – at least for 90 minutes – the tragedy that surrounded them (Urban, 2011).

It is noteworthy that right after regaining freedom, Poles rapidly returned to sporting life, including, of course, football. Unofficial games were played between very strong teams continuing the well-established tradition, such as Wisła Kraków and Cracovia Kraków (28.I.1945, 2:0 for Wisła) or Polonia Warszawa and Okęcie Warszawa (March 1945). A new tradition was also created: in Białystok the Military Sport Club (Wojskowy Klub Sportowy) playing with the representation of the Red Army (3:3, June 1945), in Krasnystaw the local «Start» beating the Red Army team 6:1 a few months earlier (Pasko, 2012).

Conclusions

There are dozens of examples of sport being influenced by politics. It is very often, too often, abused by politics, while rather rarely being supported by it.

The present article shows these aspects of sports, which are not yet widely known, though they are well worth knowing. Sport in general and football in particular are very easily used as tools of propaganda and politics; the Nazis' national team football games were not played merely for fun. Still, sport can survive even in times of tragedy and war. Sport never seems to be black or white and may result in bringing honor, hope and a substitute for normal life – as it did to the thousands of prisoners who for 90 minutes could forget about the hell they were surrounded by.

The history of football in occupied Poland reflects all aspects of the country's tragic history.

The greatest football players found themselves in the middle of the tragedy of war, joining the Nazi sport teams to be able to live normally or to save the lives of their families. The weak joined Nazi teams to achieve a better life, even at the cost of betrayal and collaboration. The brave used their better situation to help others. All of them were treated equally after World War II by the new occupier of Poland, Soviet Union and communist servants. Ordinary people wanted to play football because they were young and because they loved it. Their sport activities became yet one more sign of Polish resistance to the cruel occupants – resistance to becoming a «nation of slaves», to becoming a nation of poorly educated and developed workers in the factories of their German «masters».

The prisoners of German concentration camps located in Poland (let's hope nobody calls them «Polish concentration camps» ever again!), played football to remain human beings in the death factories and to prove that «Poland will not die, as long we are alive» (as the Polish national anthem's words say).

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El fútbol en la Polonia ocupada (1939-1945)

Resumen. *El presente artículo describe la historia del fútbol en Polonia durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial – el período más dramático en la historia del país (incluso considerando su dramática historia en general). La investigación abarca tres aspectos de la historia del fútbol en la Polonia ocupada durante el período de la Segunda Guerra Mundial: los partidos de fútbol oficiales, incluyendo no sólo los partidos de liga y de la selección sino también el trágico destino de los jugadores polacos que se vieron forzados a vestir el uniforme alemán durante la ocupación; partidos no oficiales, con la increíble historia de los partidos de fútbol que se jugaron en campos de concentración y en campos para oficiales; partidos ilegales, con las circunstancias bajo las cuales los polacos siguieron jugando a fútbol a pesar de los graves castigos que recaían sobre cualquier actividad deportiva llevada a cabo en el país ocupado. El artículo describe la desconocida y dramática historia del fútbol y los deportes en general en la Polonia ocupada, con profusión de detalles que no se mencionan en la bibliografía más conocida. Se cree que dicho aspecto de la historia de Polonia y del mundo es merecedor de más investigación y difusión.*

Palabras clave: fútbol; Segunda Guerra Mundial; Polonia; ocupación